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THE SOUL OF CEYLON

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# CEYLON

by

ASHLEY GIBSON

Author of *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago*



Illustrated by  
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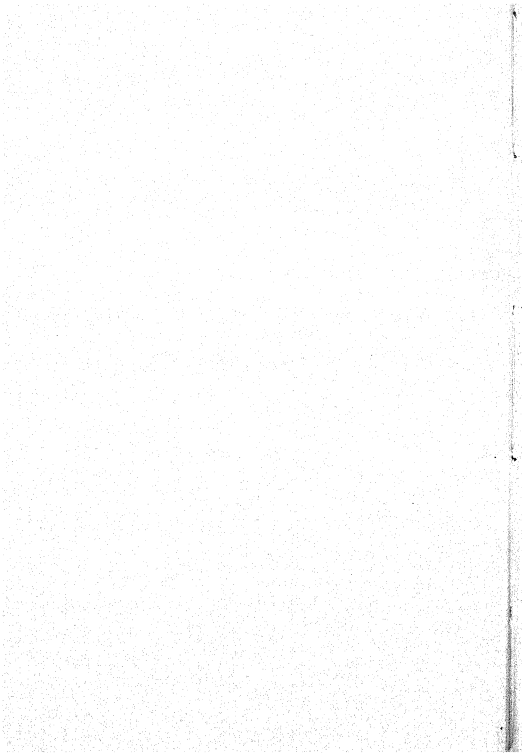
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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*Cinnamon and Frangipanni*, which in the following pages reappears as plain *Ceylon* in a series whose *raison d'être* is a practical one, was published nearly seven years ago. To-day, if I had to write the book afresh, I should do it differently. The task is one I have contemplated, and deliberately abandoned. The book "came out" that way in response to the genuine urge which produced it. With all its faults I still retain a sneaking affection for it, and written anew it might be something quite different, which I might not like at all. Certain excrescences have been pruned, various minor points of detail corrected or brought up to date. If that "soul of Ceylon," which one reviewer was kind and clever enough to discover on the volume's first appearance, really did get enmeshed somehow in the tangle of its shreds and patches, it must be still there.

Seven years in a place like Ceylon means a whole generation, and since I lived in the island there have been changes. Two short visits, and the regular letters of old friends, have kept me informed, I hope, of their character, and because "Outward Bound" books cannot afford to be behind the times, these changes must be indicated to the reader.

More than anything else, perhaps, the advent in Ceylon as elsewhere of unlimited motor-cars has affected both Asiatic and European populations. That curious thing called "European prestige" is dwindling; natives of the soil and their immigrant cousins foregather increasingly in the rest-houses they were formerly too shy to enter.

Galle Face Green, especially on Sundays, has become a quite cosmopolitan promenade, and there is an air of general emancipation outside the social confines of the heaven-born. If this is regrettable, or anybody's fault, only Europeans will regret it, and only they must be blamed. Probably it is just a matter of evolution. For in essentials, barring the planting community, with whom slumps and their economic consequences have tamed the exuberance that once enlivened Colombo and Kandy hotels at week-ends, and among whom the bachelor majority has diminished as out-station and estate bungalows have become more accessible, the Ceylon European has not changed. He is there—most of him—to make money—lots of it. Brokers, for some occult reason, count on making, and do make, more than other people. A very large car, a complete ignorance of the island, its jungle, its permanent inhabitants; an enormous bungalow in Queen's Road, furnished like a rest-house (if the family have any pretensions to culture, "etchings" from a portfolio in the big Fort stationer's are considered "severe" and chaste); the price of rubber; who has made enough money to retire next year? the latest Scotch joke, the excitement and bonhomie of the weekly tea sale, these supply all the interest and inspire all the conversation. "Getting away from Colombo" means golf at Nuwara Eliya; reading means Edgar Wallace; the play is the local dramatic society's current production; music, by the police band, is considered classical if it is Gilbert and Sullivan and not Red Hot Momma. These things provide a contentment that suffices; and along such lines new arrivals may concentrate in justifiable hopes of "making good." Fortunately the microcosm retains all the elements of a Western society, so there is a gallant European minority that maintains somehow, by help of the mail and booksellers' catalogues, contact with things of

the mind. A further section who, though confessedly outside the orbit of these influences, make simplicity their watchword and lead the quiet, decent, kindly lives they would pursue in any London suburb or provincial town at home. Colombo is a big place and, though they may want looking for, provides a social fabric with holes in it to fit almost any sort of peg. Out-station folk were always readier to welcome the stranger, and as they have been they remain.

The real difference is not in the European, who sensing change about him murmurs "Bolshies," and dismisses the matter from his mind, but in the educated natives and burghers, who are learning how to apply their intelligence, who have a permanent interest in the place which we lack and which, in time, they will employ to oust our temporary interest. It is astonishing how, in the last eight years or so, these people have progressed in their appreciation of art and music and in their general standards of living.

Compared with these matters, the mere eruptions of bricks and mortar that have occurred on familiar areas of its superficies since I first wrote of Ceylon seem hardly worth remark, but I must pay the penalty of a somewhat ill-regulated desire to be informative by duly noting them. Many new buildings in Colombo, apart from those noticed in my revised text, include the Town Hall, the usual white elephant from the public's point of view, and the Greek temple erected by the Government in its own honour in front of the old barracks on Galle Face. No Oriental influence is traceable in most of the architectural designs, steel frames combining with Roman pillars and domes constructed without apparent regard to the exigences of air or light. Already the new Customs House pile is declared to be too small to house all the activities allotted to it. Electric lifts have still to go in according to the



original plan, and adequate provision for these seems to have been overlooked.

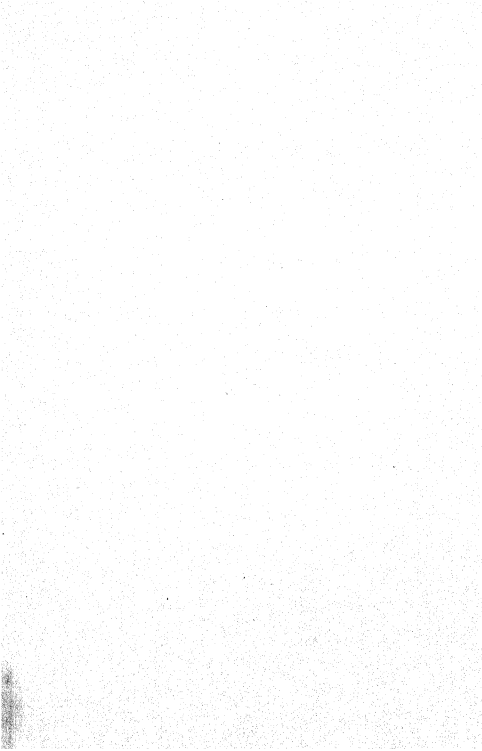
The old type of bungalow is rapidly disappearing. No more large compounds, airy verandas, and roofs of the old round tiles that were our legacy from the Dutch. On mushroom suburbs has sprung up a jerry-built Golder's Green, lacking evidences of any town-planning scheme, mean little dwellings huddled on every available bit of road frontage. They have no gardens—and yet this is Colombo! But none lacks a garage, none (æsthetes that we all are) bright blue curtains in the windows. The inhabitants of these quarters lead, as I gather, more their own lives than did their predecessors of ten years or so ago; in this year of grace the "old cats" are rather ignored and the "young cats" have different methods.

But enough of Colombo, when there are so much jollier places in Ceylon within easy range, if those garage doors mean anything. There is Trinco, clean across the island in the far north-east corner. You need sleep only one night on the road. I wish I could remember in real exactitude of detail the sad story of Francina of Trincomali, who was, I shouldn't wonder, a Dutch maiden. Certain it was, anyway, that she fell in love with a young civil servant, and certain (this is the tragic part, or half of it) that he failed to reciprocate and expedited his leave to Amsterdam. The morning of her knight-errant's departure saw Francina, quite beside herself with inhibitions and mortification, stationed upon a cliff of golden rock which, falling sheer into the greenest sea imaginable, commands the harbour entrance. When she could almost toss a pebble upon the poop of her beloved's ship as it rode out through the narrows, Francina jumped. Her pitiful remains were never found, but her sorrowing parents erected the pillar (an ancient carved Hindu monument lying handy and unclaimed in the vicinity)

which stands to this day at the spot. An annual ceremony is still held about it, not by Francina's compatriots but by the Hindus. A ghost ship too sails these waters, they say a Dutch frigate sunk by the British in a running encounter.

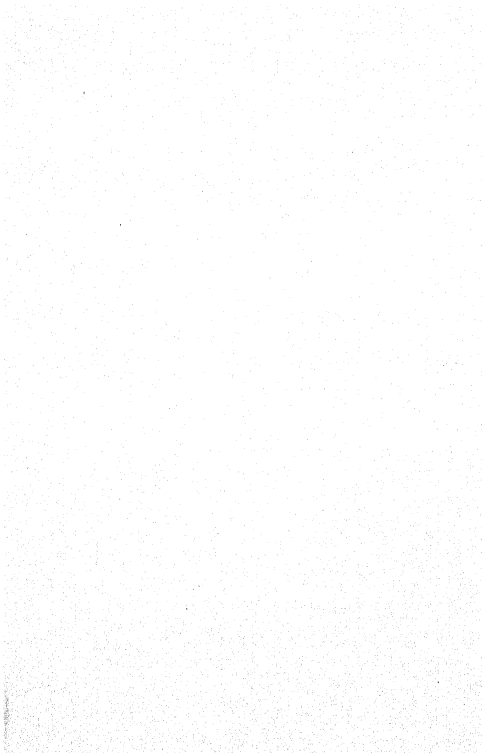
There are legends in my book already, more legends, I think, than statistics. Space forbids, or I should have taken this opportunity to mention many others, discoursed further of the island's more recent history, told the full story say of that riven rock on the Kadugannawa Pass, fulfilment of a prophecy that Kandy would never be taken until a "great rock" was pierced, which indeed it never was until the British blasted this and other rocks and made the road your car runs over to-day. On that same road there are stones put up more than a century ago to show our red-coated soldiers toiling up to the taking of Kandy which water-holes were safe for them to bathe in. I think I have mentioned Solomon, though not the Greeks and Romans, whose coins somehow found their way here and are still frequently picked up, "fakes" many of them that the Sinhalese no doubt accepted in all innocence. I have only touched upon the Dutch influence, still traceable in so many architectural evidences, forts, churches, and houses. Galle might be, is indeed, a bit of old Holland. Still occupied by the visiting justice when assizes are on, there stands at Jaffna the house of the old Dutch governors, built for giants, all its doors of rare island woods twice the usual height; a ghost too with its own romantic story. I had already one to finish up with. She must not wish for too much company.

ASHLEY GIBSON.



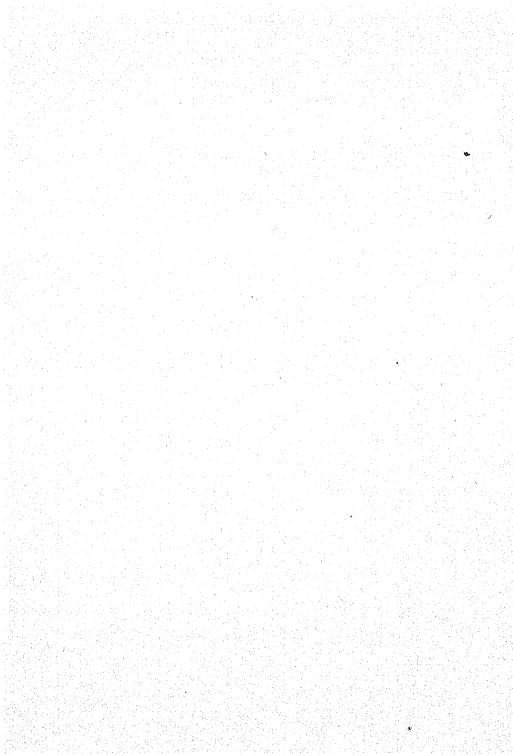
# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A ROSE-RED CITY . . . . .	1
II. NIGHT AND MORNING . . . . .	19
III. BEASTS AND SUPER-BEASTS . . . . .	33
IV. THE COMING OF VIJAYA . . . . .	85
V. THE STONES IN THE JUNGLE . . . . .	111
VI. GEMS . . . . .	143
VII. DRUMS AND INCENSE . . . . .	171
VIII. THE COMPLEAT BACHELOR . . . . .	193
IX. BLUE AND GOLD . . . . .	201



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
THE SOUL OF CEYLON . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
GALLE FACE . . . . .	I
CATAMARAN . . . . .	17
A TEMPLE IN THE JUNGLE . . . . .	19
KANDYAN CHIEFS . . . . .	21
FISHING WITH CAST-NET . . . . .	31
NIGHT WATCHMEN . . . . .	33
BILLIGAMANAYA DOES PUJA . . . . .	35
SUPER-BEASTS . . . . .	84
CARVING FROM DALADA MALIGAWA . . . . .	85
COOK RETURNS FROM MARKET . . . . .	87
WANDEROOS . . . . .	109
VEDDAS . . . . .	111
STONES IN THE JUNGLE . . . . .	113
THE SUPPLICANTS . . . . .	141
GEMMING . . . . .	143
A TRAP FOR TOURISTS . . . . .	145
LACE-MAKING . . . . .	169
A KANDYAN TOM-TOM BEATER . . . . .	171
FISHERFOLK . . . . .	173
A STELE FROM JETAWANARAMA . . . . .	192
OUR SHIRTS ARE WASHED . . . . .	193
A VILLAGE IN THE JUNGLE . . . . .	195
LEOPARD . . . . .	200
ON THE ROAD TO KANDY . . . . .	201
TEA PICKERS . . . . .	203
A KANDYAN LADY . . . . .	236





## CHAPTER I

### A ROSE-RED CITY

FIRST glimpse of herself Ceylon may show you in more ways than one; it is a matter for your skipper to determine, and be assured that jaunty, matter-of-fact little man with the clear eye and the air of quiet assurance will neither hold her in nor go all out just to please the likes of you, who may have heard that to miss a vision of the Peak emergent in mid-firmament from a nest of fluffy clouds is to forgo for ever your chance of a proper introduction. Similarly, you may, or you may not, have sensed for forty-eight hours back vagrant and recurring wafts of a faint and indeterminate perfume, warm aromatic breath of sleeping Lanka, zephyr-borne exhalations of a red and tropic earth prolific of organic life beyond all exaggeration, carried to you on steamy airs that have licked up in their passage a thousand flavourings of cinnamon and frangipanni, of vanilla, coco-nut, and musk, I doubt not nard and cassia, and all the spices herbalists at Kew and Regent's Park will find long names for, if you ask them.

More likely than not, for the little man loves to think



of his ship as being rid of you and your kind at the fag-end of the day, letting himself and his officers from the morning watch onwards call their souls their own during the dispatch of that multifarious business of which a ship in port becomes the centre, you will pick up as first visible evidence of landfall a flicker in the evening sky that grows to a beam of light drawn regularly athwart the heavens, fainter and smaller lights will ride up out of the murk, the engines will slow to a crawl, a fussy pilot's launch chug up to the gangway. Proceeds a clamour of bells in the ship's interior, a bawling of megaphones from the bridge, and you have slid past ghostly breakwaters and ride almost motionless upon an inky plain spangled everywhere about with lights, yellow, white, red, and green, some near, some far, while there comes to you over the inky flood the rattle of chains, the whirring of donkey engines, the ululating chant of harbour coolies from the lighters clustered round a vague hulk like crocodiles about a dead bull (which simile may occur to you later, but not then). You are at your moorings in Colombo harbour, and the mate whom you are probably hindering in his work will feel he ought to tell you that it is as big as Hyde Park, and, as shipping figures go, the seventh largest in the world.

It will not be land that your feet first tread upon, but the wooden steps of the new jetty, a very much more imposing structure than that which until recently would have shamed even the seventy-seventh of all ports. You will blink at the dazzle of more and stronger lights, argue with if you are foolish, and conciliate if you are well advised, such suave and uniformed minions of His Majesty's Customs as will dart upon you. Unless you are one of Nature's Ishmaels, some long-lost acquaintance or friend of a friend will thereafter propel you by the elbow up an inclined plane that lands you upon a paved causeway

where divers thoroughfares seem to meet that might be anywhere in South London, say the Elephant and Castle. Ahead of you trams go clanging up a wide street of towering buildings, obviously shops and offices; there is a flare and glitter of lights above the sidewalks, a haloed vista of lofty electric arcs along its centre. Half-right looms a thousand-windowed caravanserai that might be the Metropole at Brighton, but which is actually the Grand Oriental Hotel. Impelled by the pressure on your elbow, nine chances out of ten that this is the bearing you will follow.

Up the steps you go, through palm-ringed courts and colonnades, to sink in a moment or so into a low arm-chair, whose cunning lines Tottenham Court Road knows not yet the art of. You are in a lofty, galleried palm-court, as it might be the lounge of the very biggest and best of European hostelries. They call it the Grand Oriental Hotel. Grand? Possibly. So is the Regent Palace. Oriental? Well. Not to my mind, save for the open veranda on one side through which the sea breeze (when there is any) reaches and rustles the palm-fronds over your head without the impediment of swing-doors or glazed windows, and possibly the ticketed and numbered "boys" whose bare but far from comely feet pad hither and thither over the polished floor, not over-lightly as in the floating, airy fashion of Oriental menials of the Russian ballet, many of them rather having the abominable trick of walking on their heels. Even when they lurked slackly in corners these smirking and rather limp Sinhalese retainers, masking their native boredom behind the inscrutable smile of the well-fed tom-cat, failed on first acquaintance to make me feel at all Oriental. I watched their fathers and uncles, sporting the same womanish "buns" and Mephistophelean combs of tortoiseshell, comporting themselves in exactly the same way at the Earl's

Court Exhibition about thirty years ago, in the alcoves of Sir Thomas Lipton's tea-shop.

Not easily shall I forget how moved I was when a travelled elder to whom I looked up in my youth said to me once: "When you get to Algiers the East gets up and hits you a smack in the face." Whether that is the truth or not I do not know, having never seen Algiers save as a shimmer of white miles away on the starboard quarter, but I do know the East does nothing so vigorous at Colombo. Certainly she will disclose herself to you in due course, but languorously, indolently, and in her own time, in a fashion befitting the climate and latitude. Do not, therefore, let your natural disappointment irk you, but grapple with baggage problems like a man, and if you decide to spend the hours until the morrow on Grand Oriental lines, you might do much worse than eat your dinner here, and not too late ride upwards in the lift as high as may be, and so to bed.

If your room has a seaward outlook you will not need the mosquito curtains, to abstain from which permanently here and now seek to train yourself (you might as well learn to sleep inside a meat-safe).<sup>1</sup> Smoke a last pipe or cigarette upon the roof-garden, lean over the balustrade and see what you can see—you will find it worth it.

From far, very far below you, along the narrow strip of land whereon the old Dutch fortifications have given place to a huddle of Government storehouses and offices, the angularity of their roofs broken here and there by bosky masses of the *Spathodea* whose flamboyant scarlet blossoms will in their season glorify nearly every Colombo street, comes the creak and rumble of the bullock carts and strange explosive cries of carters busy about their never-ending task of fetching and carrying. For the port never

<sup>1</sup> There is no malaria in Colombo, not very much in most planting districts, but some have a bad reputation, Kurunegala, for instance.

goes to sleep. The big block of new Customs buildings by the harbour's edge is the focus or axis of innumerable rows of warehouses, stores, and granaries for the rice which the island has long ceased to produce in sufficiency for its own needs. Farther away to the north the harsh, serrated outlines of all these monster sheds are merged into vague hills and hummocks of coal, thousands upon thousands of tons of it. Seaward you may trace the long arms of the breakwaters, their line broken here and there by some gaunt derrick or snug, squat blockhouse, wherein pilots snatch sleep between watches, and above which rise little rigged flagstaffs, lights winking at their trucks. Within the embrace of those arms the ships of the world ride safely at anchor, while on three sides of them an angry monsoon sea flings itself ceaselessly against those seeming slender bulwarks, towering white horses rear and subside in a ghostly, never-ending cavalcade. Proud and secure ride the ships, their myriad lanterns a spangled pattern against the moon-shot background of the flood. You are probably glad you climbed up so high to see them, though by night you can any time observe as much, or more, as you glide outward bound on the tide of Mersey or London river.

But there remains the landward scene. Southward the tall new sky-scrapers of the Fort fall away somewhere by the lighthouse with its flashing, whirling beam, to give place to ugly cubist lumps of building whose only individual feature is an arched and colonnaded veranda on every story. They bear the hall-mark of utilitarian Government architecture, and you will guess rightly that they are barracks, public offices, and the like. Comes a long open stretch of grass land bordering the sea-road, rising gently landwards to a crest of low bushes, and thence again falling to the Beira lake, shimmering under the moon, while squarely athwart the sward at its farther end is set

the symmetrical fabric, rather like a German toy brick manufacturer's idea of what Buckingham Palace ought to look like, of the Galle Face Hotel. It is, as a matter of fact, a jolly good hotel too, and quite the last word in such things east of Suez. Its many-windowed façade will be bright with lights till midnight, and all Colombo is probably dancing in the ball-room. Beyond, the southern coast sweeps in a seven-mile arc to the farther landmark of Mount Lavinia, where blink the lights of another but less luxurious hostelry that stands upon the little monticule which gives it its name. That long curved inky smudge is one rustling wave of coco-nut palms, side by side with it a ribbon of yellow sand and its twin of frothing surf, the latter repeated some forty yards out where the slow rollers curl and break above a reef of coral. Beyond, dotted miles out upon the fishing-grounds, twinkle the tiny lights of the catamarans.

Eastward, industrial Colombo fades away into the blackness of the older town. The little hill you see is Hulftsdorp, hive of lawyers and shrine of justice since the Hollander's day. Larger buildings whose vague outlines loom up here and there are schools, colleges, and convents, for here Rome sends many of her sons and daughters to labour in the scholastic and missionary field among the permanent population. Foremost among all the Western Churches has she assiduously shepherded her flocks for three hundred years and more, and that single liquid note that floats up to you out of the velvety depths is from a convent bell. Northward, your eye dwells upon a criss-cross of mean thoroughfares, shops and hovels open to the crowded bustling street, their counters piled with who knows what strange and unsavoury merchandise, illumined by crude little lamps wherein strands of coir spit and splutter in malodorous coco-nut oil. Temples, squat, ugly, and overladen with gross and garish ornament

in stucco, are here too, and other larger shops, general stores run by the immigrant Moorman or Hindu, crammed from floor to ceiling with a multiplicity of household goods, Manchester textiles, and patent medicines. Even from this distance the impression you get is one of crowd, heat and chatter, of smells that are not all spicy.

Something of the East here for you to go on with. That clamorous, odorous quarter is the Pettah or native bazaar. Explore it certainly, but to-morrow morning or some other night. Remember, though, that there is more squalor than romance about the night life of Colombo as observed from ground-level. No place for you, this, to snatch a leaf out of the good Haroun al Raschid's book. Take rather your last look at the spangled wonder of the scene and turn in, while the noise of waters routing and plashing among the broken rocks of Galle Buck lulls you to sleep, and the last lingering sound in your ears is the sweet, far-away note of a single bell.

I have heard superior persons of the type that travel on tourist tickets which allow them to drop off one steamer and catch the next in a fortnight, describe Colombo as an altogether hideous locality, a blot and excrescence on an otherwise lovely page of Nature. Shallow enough criticism to one who has lived there, for though business quarter and suburbs alike have altered almost out of recognition even in the last twenty years, the town is beautiful still if you know when and how to look at it, and must always have been so. Many of the modern buildings are ugly enough, but others are nothing of the kind. The enormous block of new flats now arising on the Galle Face might have imposed a fatal blot on this historic portion of our landscape, yet the architects seem to have avoided that danger, while to judge from the plans and elevations already published of the new Chartered Bank building which is to go up this year at the junction of Queen's

Street and Baillie Street, Colombo's pride in the latest accretions to its necessary growth will here be reinforced rather than detracted from. Not all the sky-scrappers of the Fort are lacking in distinction, and the too early death of the architect who created the elegant and balanced lines of Prince's Building and other business structures in the town leaves its civic amenities so much the poorer. The city fathers are probably not aware of this, more's the pity, for in point of fact the virtue of civic pride is with the true Colombo citizen almost a minus quantity. With jealous selfishness he will take delight in the meticulous ordering of club grounds, whose lawns must always be like billiard tables, the crotons and poinsettias clipped to a smug nicety, beds and borders as trim and as prim as an army of garden coolies can maintain them, the white pillars and shining parquet floors of their cool luxurious pavilions always unspotted and immaculate. But where public works, town-planning and so forth are in question, æsthetic considerations go to the wall. Once indeed the city people went to the length of hearing what a famous town-planning expert had to say about the possibilities of improvement, put him through a long cross-examination, paid his fee, bade him farewell, and promptly forgot all about him and his recommendations. I dare say, though, not all of these were practical.

Yet the town contrives to achieve beauty in its own way in spite of everything. Last evening you looked down from the Grand Oriental Hotel roof-garden, and saw it glamorous and mysterious under the velvet mantle of the night. This morning see to it that you are out and about soon after sun-up. Take a taxi (you can get one here) or a rickshaw to the Galle Face Hotel, a splash and scramble in the swimming-bath, and ride back at your leisure, hours before the procession of tussore-clad office wallahs whirling citywards in their expensive cars poison

the morning air with dust and petrol, and observe the place in its southward aspect, a mile-long line of sand and breakers on your left, with, in the far distance, the surf battling with the rocks and flinging great tufts of spume far over the breakwater, on either side of you the pleasant greensward rolling down beyond the brushwood-screened batteries to the lake, with hanging trees at its edge and a fringe of plumed coco-nut upon its farther shore, and before you Colombo with its domed towers, the piled cubes of its sky-scrapers, and its lighthouse soaring up from the welter of less pretentious bricks and mortar, the white arcaded oblongs of the military hospital, the Gunners' Mess, and a score of official buildings of older and simpler fashion, most of them embowered in verdure shot with the scarlet flame of the ubiquitous flamboyant. There should be a breeze from the sea, and the cool freshness of early morning in the tropics will still be in your nostrils. Not yet has the sun baked the air which city-dwellers breathe till objects present themselves as through the stark clarity of a vacuum, till the sky burns a hard and pitiless blue, and to look across the street without sun-glasses makes you blink and screw up your eyes. Even while you ride, the softness and charm will fade from the picture. If essential shopping demands your attention before breakfast and you have to get out and walk no more than fifty yards, choose the shady side.

More than possibly, the urge for spending money which usually descends upon the shore-going passenger after a longish spell of sea travel will grip you some time in the forenoon. You can do this sort of thing in the place with advantage. Incidentally, you can also be rooked, bamboozled, swindled, and generally cheated and robbed, to return with empty pockets and an armful of rubbish, product of cheap labour in Brummagem or Yokohama factory. Have you a friend who knows the town and can



help you in these matters so much the better for you, otherwise try to look as unlike a passenger as possible, send to the right-about all such touts, harpies, and miscreants as pounce upon you in the street, avoid what are with one or two exceptions the cheap and shoddy emporiums of the Victoria Arcade, and keeping your wits about you enter unconcernedly the quieter establishments, of which you have your choice of some half a dozen, kept by suave golden-skinned Indians speaking perfect English, with sonorous Scindian names above their shop-fronts—Lalchand, Detaram, Chandiram. There are real treasures, too, in Topunsing Motoomull's big shop, once you have persuaded the man who serves you that the cheap Oriental fakes in the window, the slipshod lacquer and Benares brass and the grosser enormities of over-carved screens and tables of sandalwood leave you cold, and that above all things you do *not* want an ebony elephant, when he will lift down and unroll for your delight great bales of the richest crêpe silks from China and Japan, gorgeous, heavy, everlasting stuff, little of which finds its way in bulk to the European market; rare old Indian embroideries gleaming with the lovely red dyes of the South, from mulberry and rose to intensest scarlet and orange, *dhotis* and *saris*, these, which he will show you how to drape in the authentic fashion if you ask him; silk embroideries of China, jewelled and minute as if the craftsman had plied his needle under a magnifying glass; bedspreads and hangings of Merv and Samarkand, boldly arabesqued in camels' wool. Or at a word he will dive with you across the street to some godown in a by-way wherein underlings will spread before you Persian and Turkestan prayer rugs and carpets by the score. He knows the worth of these things, and will part with his treasures not for a song, but for a fair price something below that you will have to give in London.

But all this, after all, is alien stuff, imported merely to sell to people like yourself, who on their travels find it pleasant to indulge a taste for such things. Nothing you have seen but you could find if you looked for it in the right shop at any port in the Eastern seas, from Beira to Hong-Kong. Is there anything whatsoever here, you ask, truly and essentially of Ceylon? The answer is "Yes," but precious little, and that mostly of the more trumpery order of "curios," always excepting jewels, and they are worth a chapter to themselves. But you can buy quaint and not unattractive grass mats and baskets from Galle, and notably Kalutara hats woven also of grass, of all manner of shapes and sizes, and of colourings which in these days are not lacking in artistic merit, the trade being a resuscitated and now thriving village industry which receives every encouragement from Government and private patronage. And you can get lovely things, from a complete dressing-table outfit downwards, in native tortoiseshell, though it is well to interview your workman and to see that he executes his task exactly to your order, his own taste probably running to ungainly riveted shields and whatnots in gold and silver foil, reminiscent of the pencil-boxes and blotters of the suburban stationer. You must know, too, that the shell industry is suspect on humanitarian grounds, of which more anon. For the rest, modern Sinhalese metal-work of any description is beyond hope of redemption, despite a State-aided school of Arts and Crafts at Kandy, though far away up north in the Tamil colony of Jaffna a handful of artificers produce their microscopic output of golden filigree jewellery, which revival of an ancient craft certain public-spirited people are doing their best to encourage. But the creative gift seems in all these islanders less than rudimentary, and their best achievements merely the slavish copies of copies, *ad infinitum*. Some of the real old Kandyan brass is

“jolly,” and that is about all one can say for it, while the market is full of the most transparent fakes. You will do better, if such things take your fancy, delving for souvenirs of the Dutch and Portuguese epochs in the way of pottery and minor bric-à-brac. Here and there you can pick up, notably from the old Sinhalese dealer Perera, whose dark and tiny den you will find in the hinder recesses of the first building facing you on the left as you step up from the jetty, a lovely old piece of Dutch or Oriental china, and there is quite a cult locally for the collection of old Dutch snuff-boxes of brass. There is authentic Dutch furniture to be had, too, old as or older than our own Chippendale and Sheraton, made on the spot of various beautiful island woods, ebony, satinwood, calamander, and the rest, but much-admired pieces I have frequently considered lumpish and ungainly. Usually, too, they are all armour-plated and bedizened with shields, buttons and kickshaws of brass, added by successive owners in token presumably of their virtuosity. A huge trade is done in “stumer” chests and coffers, fashion having followed the vogue set by various good women with more money than taste. A really genuine antique chest is a rarity of rarities in a private bungalow, yet you will see any day in the Colpetty Road bullock carts loaded up with the imitation article, the raw and new-sawn surfaces of its under-parts belying the spurious appeal of brass-studded panels. But I had almost forgotten the Galle lace, a real Ceylon product whose essential merit is unsurpassed anywhere in the Orient. It is obtainable in a multiplicity of forms and designs, many of the latter both ingenious and charming, compares favourably with our own pillow lace of Buckinghamshire, and will stand no end of wear and washing. Nor will the proverbial “last price” of the ivory-toothed Sinhalese damsel who sells it to you prove at all exorbitant.

Emphatically you should spend a few days in this place. Make use of letters introducing you to our celebrities if you have them; otherwise you will miss opportunities of observing the social life of the town, at least on the European side, for here we are very prim and proper, and you will never contrive to scrape acquaintance with us lacking formal introductions, even if you can afford to take the most expensive suite at the Galle Face Hotel for six weeks. This may or may not matter; it depends upon your tastes and temperament. If you are one of those cynical and unconventional people with a tincture of the "blushing artist" in you, we are still prepared to show you hospitality of a rather formal sort if you come armed with the right credentials, and should you find us now and then unconsciously amusing—well, you have been something of a passing diversion yourself, and if ever you come and really *live* here, mark you, we will soon put you in your place and keep you there.

Here you will find the prosperous, established people living a curiously stilted, gawky, and artificial life, many hours of every day of it frittered away in half a score of clubs, where there is little true *camaraderie*, hardly a trace of the easy give-and-take, the genuine sociability and open-hearted friendliness that you somehow look for in a British colony. Coming perhaps via South Africa or Australia you will be puzzled, a little piqued, to find your welcome either frigid or gushing, it depends upon your letters of credit, but almost everywhere lacking in the spontaneity, the transparently sincere desire to be of use to you because you are a stranger, that elsewhere you have found so altogether charming.

But *you* have no business to grumble. Old friends who have forgathered in the place for a quarter of a century, who have grown rich as partners in the same firm, smoked and tippled together in the same clubs, watched in each

other with a detached interest that slow metamorphosis which in the course of long years transforms a slim, clear-eyed, athletic boy into a gross, irascible, ludicrous old hunks of a money-grubber, are not really friends, nor are their wives and daughters. Each would be inexpressibly shocked were the other to invade the sanctity of his bungalow by walking in unasked after dinner, always a solemn and pompous function for which each, as his turn comes round, will receive a formal invitation once or perhaps twice in a twelvemonth. All calls are ceremonial, and to be performed as such within a rigid time-table of hours. Cliques flourish. Scandal abounds. Golly, what a place! and thank Heaven for the few exceptions which, if you are lucky, you will encounter to prove the foregoing rules. They exist; but how pitifully thin their ranks as seen against the big battalions of the moneyed Philistine. I defy a world-famous artist to hold an exhibition of his pictures in Colombo, a great musician to give a recital of classical masterpieces, a great writer to lecture upon the art and practice of Literature, and in so doing attract the attendance of more than a handful or so of Europeans, unless he has previously enlisted the sympathy and support of Mrs. Midas Goldbags and her fellow-dowagers, in which case, of course, the Public Hall tickets will go off like wildfire.

Why is it? you may ask. God knows; but one feels somehow, particularly if you investigate old chronicles and impressions of the place, that things were not always so. It is depressing to think that where social and intellectual amenities are in question the metropolis of our premier Crown Colony should have retrogressed rather than advanced, but there it is, read the riddle how you like. Is it because the god of the place is Money, that the mercantile boom of the last generation or two has swamped the town with get-rich-quick Wallingfords?

Barren of any intellectual life or collective desire for it, deaf and blind to the appeal of things of the mind, Colombo certainly is and threatens to remain.

If circumstances decree that you should live here for more than, say, a year, increasingly will your environment cramp, harass, and disturb you the longer you stay in it, unless, of course, after reasoning the thing out for yourself you decide that Fate which put you here means you to become like everybody else, in which case you sink your individuality, stifle your idiosyncrasies and fads, and float with the tide. But if you think the material gains justify no such poltroonery, keep a watch on yourself lest you grow too hopelessly jaundiced and embittered for ultimate recovery. When the faces of all your male acquaintance who go down to the Fort in cars appear to you in the likeness of brutes—horses, dogs, and pigs—when the visages of their wives are seen dehumanised as those of lizards, hens, and weasels, and in the quick business-like fingers that gather up the tricks you lose at ante-prandial bridge in the club card-room you discern but the deft and busy claws of the mongoose and the marmoset, then is the time to pack your trunks and wire to your chief that you are coming home on urgent medical leave. If he refuses it you must resign out of hand, remembering that once a certified lunatic you will never get away, master mariners being refused leave to carry such out of the island.

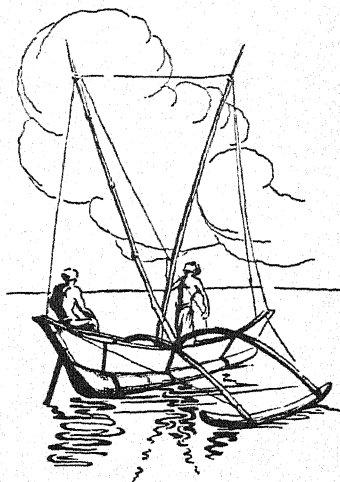
I will spare you the tag from Bishop Heber (to which heretofore no writer on Ceylon has felt himself strong-minded enough to give the go-by), while still finding it quite altogether impossible to reconcile so much that is petty, stupid, and snobbish in the human atmosphere of the place with the haunting loveliness of the stage upon which so many of these sordid little tragedies and comedies are played out. At home we pity our suburbans, finding

excuses for their cramped and narrow outlook in the psychological influences of mean streets and drab architecture. Yet here stupidity and uncharitableness flourish in a township that is more truly a garden city than any other I have met with in my travels.

You will discover that nine-tenths of English society has its abode in or adjoining the lovely suburb of Cinnamon Gardens. The name itself is fragrant, exquisite, as are those of many of its thoroughfares—Flower Road, Green Path, and the rest, no misnomers these either to recall the grim irony that labels a London slum Paradise Court, but vistas of fairyland one and all, winding ways whose hue of warm and glowing red one can relish without bothering to remember anything about climatic erosion or disintegrated laterite, and over which a thousand graceful exotics link and lace their fronds and leafage in a complete and perfect arch. Or perhaps where the roads are wider mammoth bungalows will rise from acres of superb lawn, dotted and ringed with beds of vivid flowers and colonnaded with palms, straight arecas like graceful Venetian masts, the ubiquitous coco-nut, never quite erect but ever with a slight and languid droop this way or that, the shaggy kitul or toddy palm, the bushy talipot, and the obese cabbage palm, which always looks as if its bark were too tight for it. Often, where cross-roads meet, the astounding banyan rears its maze of flying buttresses and air-borne filaments, its spreading coronal hooding a strange congeries of trunks, branches, twigs, and tendrils, a giant cluster as it were of vegetable stalagmites and stalactites, fibres dangling from its canopy that are destined, once they strike the ground, to take root again and bulk ultimately into massive limbs.

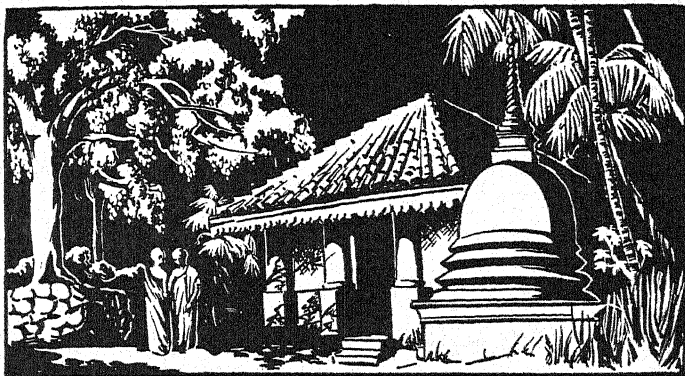
Here plants of every tropic and sub-tropic clime that at home your horticultural enthusiast nurses and forces into sickly and uncertain life under glass are seen in their

true apotheosis. With barbaric fecundity, Nature magnifies the puny curiosity of flower-pot and bell-glass to a lusty, slashing growth whose proportions seem too Gargantuan to be true. Feeling like Gulliver in a field of Broddingnagian corn, you may walk between lilies twice the height of a man. There are flowers, flowers everywhere, red flowers especially, which carry on the note of the glowing earth, of many an old warm washed wall and building. High overhead the cinder-glow of massed *Spathodea* mimics the dying glory of such a sunset as you may see wax and fade any night over the sea from Galle Face, while nearer to earth the myriad and hotter stars of hibiscus burn in every garden hedge. The greens in their complementary masses are lush, restful, and delicious. Sprouting in great clumps are the succulent firm leaves of cannas and other liliaceous plants, seemingly crunchable as fresh lettuce. Huge drooping plumes of plantain, papaws like overgrown castor-oil plants, the stiff and silvery fans of the traveller's palm, with above all the rustier nodding crowns of coco-nuts like up-ended feather mops of giant stature, make a tropic back-cloth across which a thousand lesser growths weave their intricate pattern. The burnished jak, dark, glossy, and majestic, seems an interloper from the sombre primeval glooms in all this jostle of more ephemeral greenery. And through





all these leafy choirs striped squirrels skip and birds flit and chatter, notably the blue-jewelled kingfisher and the harlequin Ceylon robin in his black and white. Some of them even sing, a mere bar or so of rich liquid utterance, strange and attractive, but with all the width of the world between it and the carol of your English blackbird.



## CHAPTER II

### NIGHT AND MORNING

A WRITING man I knew once, who had never sailed those seas but in the ships of other people's fancy, but whose wit erupted sometimes in flashes intuitively illuminating, announced that the East was only an invention of the nineteenth century, an expression not of philosophy, of geography, but of temperament; a dream, in short, that had led many to leave their people for its people, their homes for its desert tents, in an effort, it might be, to turn its conventions into realities. It was a dream, he would have it, made possible by the discovery of local colour. Vulgarised by the rude touches of many fingers, its glamour has all but departed, but not before it has caught some of us and whisked us out of our proper orbit, leaving us writhing, like stranded starfish, in hot discomfort beneath alien rays. Bastard Orient though the modern capital of that Serendib may be, the tale of whose wonders kept even Scheherazade's lord from pondering

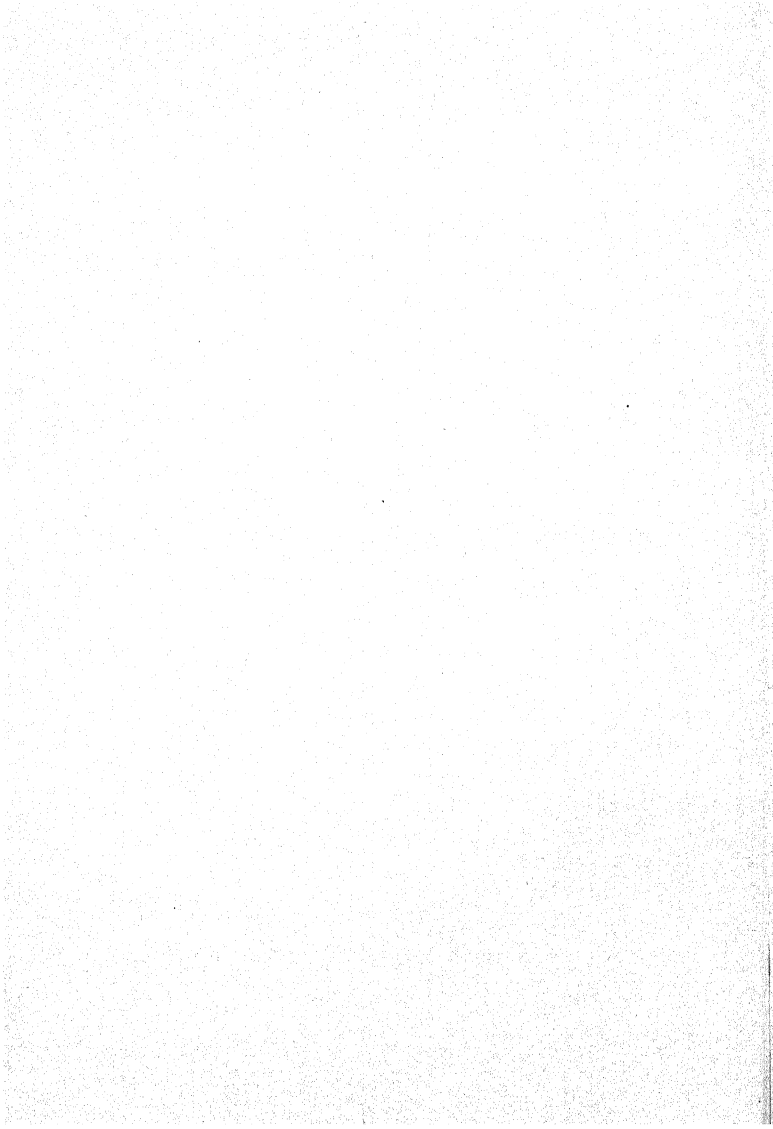
on unpleasant matters, yet Colombo has its sights, its scents, its sounds, whose memory will be always with us albeit we contemned them before they had time to become familiar. Somewhere in the brain there are stored panoramas of beauty, scenic snapshots that memory conjures up again at will; but the charm vanishes from the fairest of these when the same picture, yet not the same, is flaunted on a gaudy postcard. When the bioscope man follows in our tracks and invites our appreciation of his labours, the vulgarising process is complete. Of scents some will hold that these speak only to the crude and barbaric spirit, that their true devotees people the half-world and the hairdresser's shop, but I have nursed my doubts of that ever since the hour when I tasted the first faint savour of Ceylon's balmy breath three days out upon the high seas. Yet who doubts that the ear is the gateway to the inner courts of the soul, or that the sounds of our exile heard again by chance are the one infallible elixir for quickening the old forgotten things of our dead past? What more thrilling memory than of such awesome and mysterious sounds as held you rigid with terror in your child's crib? Is not black night the time for savouring the true essence and quality of sound, a wakeful couch the only vantage ground for arriving at a proper idea of the real significance of noise?

If you sleep like a log in Colombo there will be many to envy you, but you will miss certain experiences (I am assuming that you are out for experiences). London or Paris with the very sounds of the night are wont to lull their citizens to slumber. It is with the nearby drone of the motor-bus and the taxi and the far-away subterranean purr of the Tube train that these stony-hearted step-mothers sing their children to sleep.

The paths by which we fare to the land of Nod lie, however, through other and less pleasant places. A whim



KANDYAN CHIEFS



of ours it may be to get to our office (if we have an office) early in the morning, wherefore we spread our tent beside one of the main thoroughfares that radiate from the Fort. Each eve, a short hour or two after sundown, we seek our well-earned pillow. Sleep, the jade, eludes us for a spell, hovers irresolute, trembles on the verge of surrender—then starts and flees in horror. A shrieking sisterhood of grass coolies (aged Tamil ladies enjoy the monopoly of this craft) have plunged without a moment's warning into the eldritch music of a Witches' Sabbath, and that at our compound gate. As souls not wholly lost they quaver off into silence after a brief hour or so. Thereafter a respite, broken only by Ramasamy, good jovial wight, who joins with his mates in a corroboree held in the centre of the highway. His song, lasting a little longer than that of his aunts and grandmothers, is less inhuman if slightly more alcoholic. He concludes with the Tamil National Anthem. But the show is not over yet, and the next turn reveals itself as a troupe of highly-trained pariahs who, squatting on their hams in a half-circle, beguile the listening ear with the sad songs of their own native plains. There is peace again even for another half-hour, what time a stealthy footstep crunching the gravel beneath our window draws us silent-footed to that coign of observation. Good, 'tis Ramlan, our favourite constable, faithful fellow, though opportunity does betimes cheat him of an arrest by a bare five minutes or so. Yet he and his minions have our welfare at heart, signing a book that rests upon the stable shelf in witness thereof three times between sunset and cockcrow. He is gone, and a gecko chirps blithely from the rafters to cheer him on his way. A bandicoot drops softly to the washstand, removes the lid of the soap-dish, and daintily regales himself with a light supper of Brown Windsor. On the ledge outside the window a ridiculous monster that boasts two rusty fret-

saws as hind legs gently scrapes one upon the other, having no guitar handy, by way of serenade to his lady-love in the syringas. He sleeps at length, the world sleeps, we sleep, until a soft patter on the roof grows to a roar, a warning plop on one corner of the matting is taken up and re-echoed once, twice, multitudinously, and a glissade of drops hisses through a crescendo to a cascade that impinges relentlessly upon seven points of the only Persian rug that nice boy from Mespot forgot to take away with him.

. . . . .

There are certainly occasions on which it becomes more amusing not to go to bed at all.

Titania might have held her court one night that I remember in the vestibule of a huge sarcophagus of a place, walled about as were these normally sombre and even funereal halls with shafts and tendrils of delicate greenery, jewelled with the loveliest flora of Ceylon, and lit by a thousand twinkling lamps.

From the heart of a green bower studded with nodding lotus the plash and tinkle of the fountain radiates delicious wafts of coolness. One makes a note of the spot as the ideal rendezvous and refuge in moments of escape from the thronged halls and corridors beyond. Up the grand staircase, sweeping to right and left, the walls of this verdant dell are prolonged in lines of palms linked by trailing creepers, while in the twin recesses on the first landing, caryatid-like beneath arches picked out with winking lamps, two stalwart and gorgeously caparisoned creatures stand, immobile as statues, on either side of a silken rope that runs down the stairway and lightens the labours of those assiduous A.D.C.'s whose task it is to see that no impatient member of the "Ups" trespasses upon the freer passage of the "Downs."

Soon the porch and its approaches, vestibule and stairs,

are crowded with a slowly ascending throng. Those who are wise come early, for in a short ten minutes or so one may observe from above a scene reminiscent of the moving stairway at Piccadilly Circus at such moments as the machinery refuses to function. It is good-humoured promiscuity, however, that resolves itself at the staircase head, a little out of breath perhaps, into a stream of humanity apparelled in its extra special best clothes that flows on to the less-crowded refuges of ball-room, drawing-rooms, corridors, and balcony. In the ball-room, though, the crush grows all too soon as dense as before, for down the centre runs a double cord delimiting the aisle along which the High-and-Mightinesses of our Colonial microcosm are to pass from the penetralia to mingle for a glad and fleeting hour with the herd, retiring for a breather after every plunge to the sanctuary of that dais which is festooned with more silken cords.

Rises a silvery fanfare of trumpets, falls a sudden hush of conversation, the great doors go thundering back, and hidden musicians apply themselves lustily to the only tune every Englishman knows.

Slow marches in the van another gorgeous apparition like those watchers on the stairs, though this one holds a fearsome blade before him at the carry, and reminds us of the Sultan beneath whose eagle eye the adorable Dal-baicin has to tread her Scheherazade measure in "The Sleeping Princess." Thereafter the Olympians. Quite impressive this, and so far an Italian ballet-master could not have done better.

But some of these resplendent A.D.C.'s who bring up the rear must have been cutting rehearsals. One of them (Oh! poor young fellow, and sorry I am for the youth indeed), not being positive what he ought to do with his unusually long legs, blunders out of step, kicks out to recover, and brings a spurred boot down fair and



square on a train of regal brocade. There is the pop of a fairy champagne cork, some metallic mystery fails to respond to an unexpected stress (every woman in the room frames an instant diagnosis), the fat is in the fire and the train—but now we realise what ladies-in-waiting are really waiting for. There is just a pause of a second or two, and deft fingers have repaired the damage; smiles, blushes, and gracious whisperings ensue, and the parade re-forms and carries on indomitably with never the flicker of an eyelid. All is well, and by-gones are to be by-gones. At least I sincerely hope so.

On, then, with the dance! Those who have legs, prepare to shake them now.

Extraordinarily in the way though, yonder obstinate phalanx of kill-joys looming heavily about walls and doorways. Too fascinated perhaps by the giddy gnat-dance of colour and movement that goes swirling, eddying, and shimmying (not literally, in these arcana of august and sublimated respectability, but what other word so well denotes a syncopated rhythm?) to make themselves scarce and let others, whose legs are still all that they ought to be, demonstrate that interesting fact in the orthodox manner.

But they remain incorrigible, an inert and listless chorus who wantonly confine the area of our gyrations for so much of the evening as is left. Many there are, however, who mercifully withdraw by degrees, claimed by the subsidiary attractions of buffet, bar, and lounge, the encounters of old acquaintance in cushioned alcoves which invite gossip, or the open freshness of the lawns whereon scores of chairs and tables are set out under the temple trees among whose leaves ten thousand fairy lanterns glimmer and wink, and where, above all, the rain holds off nobly.

Futile to attempt any penetration of the supper-room unless you are a stand-out man in the rugger scrum.

So why not on with the dance? Let joy, by all means, be as unconfined as possible.

As the ball-room empties one gets a better chance to appreciate its decorative scheme. You perceive that a prodigal array of flowers and graceful plants have been disposed in a design whose dominant note still contrives to be one of lightness and grace, and from the dull gold of their frames the rubicund and whiskered countenances of Governors and Colonial bigwigs of old time twinkle merrily down through their garlands of festive greenery upon the eddies of gorgeously be-frocked and be-sari'd ladies and their squires, resplendent in uniform or more sober civilian array. The ample habiliments of Kandyan Chiefs rustle stiffly in corners and doorways, here and there the head of a Department ruffles it decorously in more than one variation of the Windsor uniform, while a benign and venerable figure (can it be the Attorney-General?) seems to have stepped straight out of the pages of *Vanity Fair*.

I suppose you will have to go home some old time. If you have lost the ticket with the number of your car on it (that perspiring but still polite policeman gave you one, do you not remember?), it is an unpopular man you will be this night.

Let the throng batter you and yours in the carpeted loggia and they insist. Hold your ground stoutly, all will yet be well.

Not meant for you, but well and truly in your ear, rises a wail, ineffably pitiful.

"Pogo!" (*What a name for a man!*) "For Heaven's sake, get hold of the car somehow. *My shoes are full of blood!*"

Odd little adventures happen to you here.

At the Hôtel des Palmiers (it is not in the directory) you

meet all the world and his wife who go a-voyaging beyond Suez. One dines, dances, and flirts, in halls and colonnades of dazzling light set in a hanging garden of palms on the edge of a sea that washes, not the chalk cliffs of Sussex or the rocky bastions of the Côte d'Azur, but the palm-fringed coasts and islets of the Eastern seas.

Here, on a night when the great ball-room was filled to overflowing with women in their Paris dresses and bronzed but emaciated menfolk in white shell jackets, I watched three people supping at a round table in an alcove whence one glimpsed fairy lamps nodding in the plumes of waving coco-nut on the terrace, heard the sighing of the almost tideless ocean as it lapped the balustrades at our feet.

Just a girl, and two men, a fair proportion for the sexes in these parts, so there was nothing very odd about that. Of an almost startling blonde beauty with great eyes of periwinkle blue, she seemed not more than twenty. Vivacious, very; not English perhaps. Certainly the fierce old man with grey eyebrows and imperial might be a Russian diplomat, old style. Her father, no doubt. The young man on her left was a trifle too stout to be really good-looking. Wrapped up in each other though, they seemed. It might be that this starry Venus and her portly Adonis were on their honeymoon, with the grim old father-in-law obviously footing the bill (the waiter, at least, knew whom to give it to), and indulging in the rather fatuous proceeding of seeing the young people part way on their travels. Strange how often "in-laws" will tempt catastrophe in this manner.

The *toilette* of Venus was unconventional, but charming. Just a short, bunchy skirt of black chiffon velvet and a loose-sleeved jumper of Chinese embroidery, pinned below the throat with a huge emerald brooch. The flashing heart of the gem caught the light as I glanced her way, the sudden dazzle of its green fires almost making me blink.

People like me do not live at the Hôtel des Palmiers. We cannot afford it. My abode—for, when I can get away from them, I hate bungalows with their hordes of thieving servants and never-ending housekeeping worries—was in those days a more modest little establishment some half a dozen miles down the coast, convenient by railway for one's office, and infinitely salubrious in situation, standing as it does on a palm-bordered hillock of greensward, at its foot a bay ringed with coral where one climbed out over the rocks each morning to take a header into twelve feet of pellucid water, as like as not straight into a shoal of little darting fish, striped and spotted in gay greens and yellows. One got the globe-trotters at the week-ends though, the place being famous for its prawn curries.

The next day was Sunday, as it happened. Mercifully an almost strangerless breakfast had left my nerves unruffled, and I lay out on the rocks in the lazy tropic forenoon, smoked a pipe, and failed to read a novel.

Voices and laughter. Paris heels tip-tapping on the rocks where the fiddler crabs crawled and scuttled, the *frou-frou* of dainty skirts clutched more than knee-high, a twinkling of cream silk stockings revealing the neatest ankle conceivable, the laboured panting of a somewhat beefy Adonis toiling in Beauty's wake with an armful of cushions and a parasol.

More thrills of delightful laughter from behind a big rock. Re-enter Venus Anadyomene, minus her stockings, the warm curling surf lapping and frothing at her adorable coral toes.

That the love-birds might enjoy their Eden undisturbed, I hid behind my novel. Less considerate the little band of dark-eyed rustics, quickly attracted from nowhere to grin at the strange *mem-sahib* practising white man's madness.

Screams of delight, ineffectual splashings, and little

thrills and roulades of laughter, continued for a space. Then there was a tiny shriek of real dismay, scampering and scurrying, an ejaculation from the portly Adonis, much rapid and earnest dialogue. The grinning rustics shambled closer.

I looked up from my book.

Venus Anadyomene was in tears, Adonis clearly discomfited.

"What is it, sir? An accident?"

The young man was agitated. "This lady haf lost her brooch."

"*Quelle bêtise!*" My Venus herself butted in. "Foolish me, so to pin up my skirt. Monsieur, 'tis worth tree hundred pound, I do assure. An emerald in a jewel old-fashioned yes, *à la russe*."

"We will find it, madam. These coolies will search. Your husband will offer a reward."

"Ah, Monsieur. If zees gentleman were my husband, the brooch not matter vun leetle scrap."

I retired, I hope in good order.

Rolled back and forth beneath those golden sands by the lazy Indian Ocean, the emerald is probably there yet. Green bottle glass rounded to a tiny pebble. Who knows, or cares? Except perhaps the old gentleman with the eyebrows.

There was another fat man who used to haunt the bathing-pool. For months he lived at our hotel, and long after he had flitted elsewhere he turned up regularly on Sunday mornings in the men's bathing-hut, a genial hippopotamus in a striped swimming-suit. But an excessively impressionable hippopotamus. Each nymph under thirty-five who ever dallied at the hotel while waiting for the next mail-boat made an instant conquest of his heart. A cavalier of infinite resource too, this pachydermatous Strephon. Not a charmer but he got to know, after a

fashion, somehow. The frigid eye, the ice-maidenly reserve, that sublime unconsciousness of the presence of any strange male whatsoever in the offing which your English Miss from sixteen to sixty usually counts on with reliance to discourage promiscuous conversation even on the top of Mont Blanc, failed egregiously in his case. The variety of his gambits was extensive and peculiar, but mostly they had a marine setting. Doubtless he felt more of a desperate fellow in his striped bathing-suit, and the opening round was usually staged in the water. Chloe it might be would steal coyly down the beach in a dressing-gown from her own enclosure, trip into the surf a good hundred yards away, and proceed to such gambols as amused her. Puffing like a walrus, Strephon would hurtle through the air from the diving-board, disappear with a tremendous splash, and be seen emerging some minutes later, either by accident or design, within easy hail of the fair stranger. Under these conditions it was surely permissible to say something, even if only "Good morning," but Strephon was more original. It used to be, "I'm Neptune. What!" Sometimes he was "rude Boreas." There was one opening reserved for extra special occasions, when the hearty note might seem misplaced. Blowing like a seal, he would emerge well within range according to habit, bring his robust limbs to anchor upon the sand, rub the water out of his goggle-eyes, and survey the landscape with profound interest.

"What little wind there was"—he used to murmur, "What little wind there *was*, seems to have died away."





## CHAPTER III

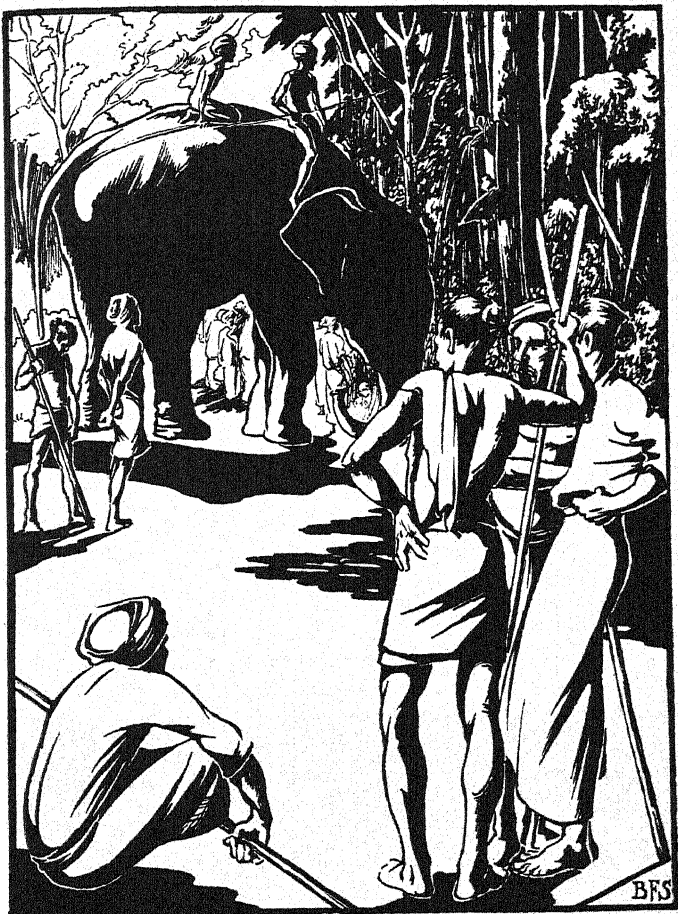
### BEASTS AND SUPER-BEASTS

I KNOW few town-bred Englishmen these days who can tell a blackbird's from a thrush's song, a frog from a toad, a hedge- from a house-sparrow, and though you may not, as a new-comer, heretofore have acquired an abiding interest in the animal world, you cannot live in Ceylon for three months and not learn something of its natural history. With some of its more ubiquitous forms of life at least you will grow acquainted, for its myriad diversity of creatures are for ever and everywhere flying, crawling, creeping, burrowing, in the earth, air, and water about you, and you will find that some proportion of this multitudinous life will necessarily insist upon interesting itself in *you*. Should you happen to have fled the town, sleep must be sought to the deafening accompaniment of a Bedlam chorus of jungle noises. Even in a Colombo bungalow conversation from the hour of dusk must be conducted to the incessant refrain of strange shrillings, hoots, flutings, and catcalls from without the veranda, the zoonings and ploppings of blundering winged intruders, the sometimes appallingly disconcerting Tchh! Tchh! Tchh! of the gecko on the ceiling, and ominous scampers and scurryings in the roof betokening the

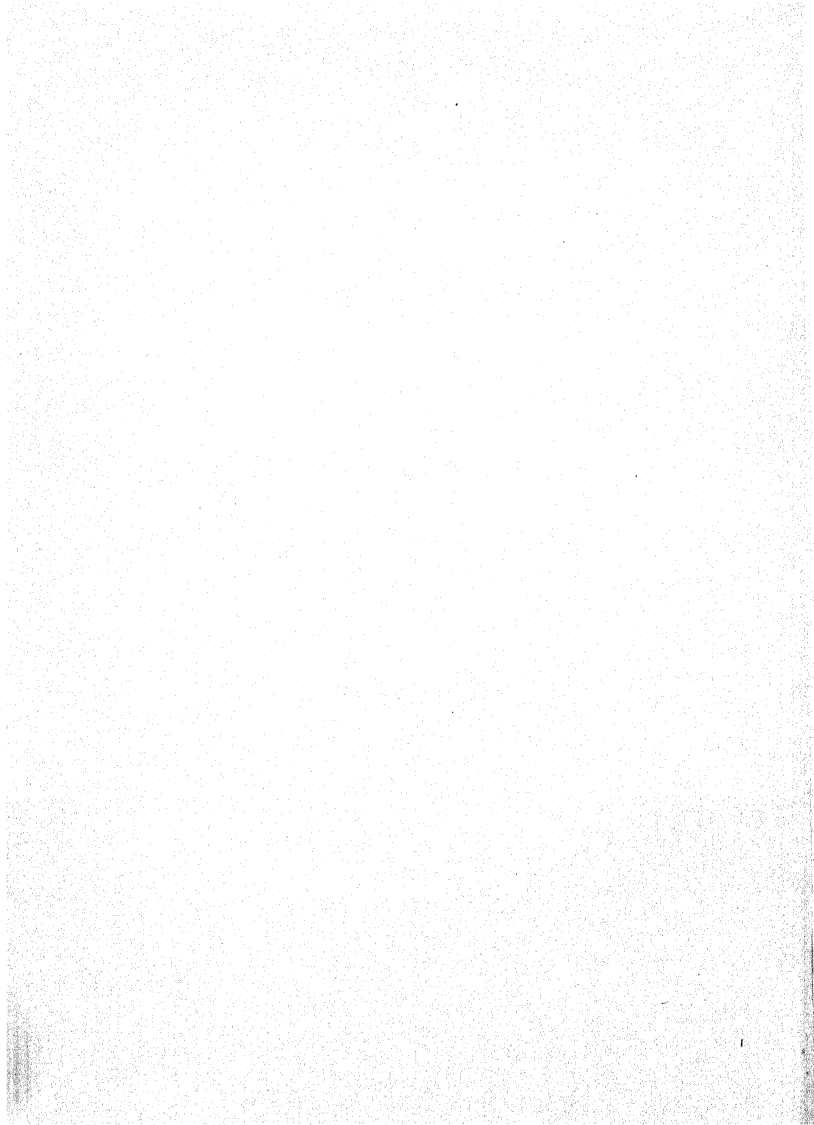


household activities of the palm-cat and jungle-cat, more likely still the six-foot ratsnake. Do you practise golf putts in your compound, the squirrels will find your lost ball and play noisy games with it on the roof before sun-up. Your bedroom upstairs will have shutters, and when in monsoon time your boy forgets to open these before he switches on the lights it may chance, at five minutes to the dinner hour, that you will be screamed for to the rescue of the partner of your bosom, hair-brush in hand, saucer-eyed, rigid with terror, following with hypnotised stare an aerial Derby, *un voyage autour de ma chambre*, in which a dozen bats are vying for the honours. Crannied in the carved and fretted cornice, your bedroom is theirs by day, though you never knew. A crooked picture offends your eye. Proceed to straighten it, and an indiarubber frog hurtles from behind it in a parabolic curve which suggests propulsion from a trench mortar, and will certainly carry him to a lodgment on the other side of the room. Should this not prove part of the head-dress or person of a *burra-mem* your spouse is desirous of placating, so much the better. By night the mosquito is ever with you, nets or no nets, and it is better to learn by advice than experience the wisdom of shaking the centipedes and scorpions out of your shoes before putting them on in the morning. Do not stroke the praying mantis who alights on your arm because he seems a whimsical creature. Physically and temperamentally, he is as well equipped to retaliate as an angry lobster. And if you wish to emulate the late Sir Robert Bruce and take lessons from the squat and hairy spider who lurks behind your wardrobe (which you must learn to call an *almirah*), take them through a telescope. He bites. For other innumerable tips in this wise, consult any old resident.

I could tell you stories about elephants, and will, because I consider that even to this date elephants have been



BILLIGAMANAYA DOES PUJA



shamefully neglected by the best authors, Mr. Kipling notwithstanding. There is something super-animal, if I may say so, about the elephant's attitude towards life. It is a crime to shoot him in any conceivable circumstances, save and except when he becomes an authentic rogue and actually a menace to humankind. He takes so long to grow up, and imbibes such profound store of wisdom in the process, that only your dullest of trophy-hunting, story-telling bores of the type that keeps a stuffed bear in the hall and a yawning hippo's head over the dining-room fire-place, can derive any real joy from his deliberate destruction. Nor in Ceylon at least can the destroyer plead that he shoots to maintain a wife and family, not one Ceylon elephant in a hundred (some say in three hundred) carrying tusks worthy of the name. The ethics of the thing apart, there is a licence to be paid for in these days by those who still insist on shooting elephants, barring, of course, duly proclaimed and certified "rogues," the non-resident in particular being mulcted in a stiffish tax; but the fact remains that by the long-continued activities of the itinerant sportsman, the huge inroads of planting enterprise upon Ceylon's virgin jungles, perpetual "kraalings" on the part of chiefs and headmen, and illicit trappings, spearings, and harryings by the villager and the "veddah" of the remoter regions, the island's elephant population has been enormously diminished in the last half-century. What it may approximately be to-day it is impossible to guess. There are those who say that the herds have increased even during the last decade or so. Ten years ago it was hazarded that two thousand might still remain, but no one knows or can know, the elephant being a rapid and inveterate traveller, fanciful as to his food and drink, and willing to go far for the sole purpose of doing himself well in these particulars. Responsive to vagaries of climate and rainfall and their

effect upon the local vegetation, he may vanish utterly from one district to overrun another where he has been thought scarce, and a few years ago the unprecedented spectacle was reported of a herd three hundred strong, and numbering several tuskers, having been seen bathing and disporting themselves in a single smallish tank in the Eastern Province.

Stories too might be told of the leopard, the bear (every planting district points out to you with pride its old lady who was once hugged in her adventurous youth), of the sambhur or elk, and the lesser breeds of four-footed game, of the wallowing crafty buffalo and the valorous wild boar, which latter true Ceylon sportsmen go out to vanquish with their hounds certainly, though not with horse and spear, but afoot, a stout hunting-knife their only weapon. But exciting as they may be made if retailed with the proper zest, there is a sameness to my mind about big-game stories. Read Gordon Cumming or Sir Samuel Baker and you need read none of their successors, provided you divide the bags of these bygone Nimrods by some ten or a dozen, for too many Cummings and Bakers have taken their ruthless and unnecessary toll in Ceylon as in India, Africa, and elsewhere where the nobler breeds of game at one time abounded. For a record of aimless butchery, in fact, nothing can touch the last-named "sportsman's" *Rifle and Hound in Ceylon*, wherein he relates with gusto how himself and his friends would pursue a herd of elephants till they had destroyed every member of it, bulls, cows, and calves, or leave camp soon after day-break, shoot and kill a score of buffaloes by 8 a.m., and then make tracks for fresh hunting-grounds, leaving the plain littered with useless carcasses. And yet this amiable Victorian baronet takes the Ceylon Government to task for tolerating the destruction of wild deer and other animals by the Tambies or Moormen, and makes a point

in the preface to his precious book of his desire rather to minimise than exaggerate his exploits.<sup>1</sup>

Mine, save for the tale of the noble elephant Kandula—which I have taken the liberty of reconstructing from the Mahavansa chronicles, wherein one may read likewise of the thaumaturgic activities of King Buddhadasa—are twentieth-century stories, and I hope neither exaggerated nor minimised; nor are their protagonists such as those whose death-masks will goggle at you from wall, floor, and ceiling in the chambers of our old or new aristocracy.

Elephant-catching as I saw it, and I will admit that I have only seen the performance carried through once, is a cruel and repulsive business, yet not so much so as it would appear to have been made under the old-time procedure, described in vivid detail by a correspondent of Sir Alexander Johnstone,<sup>2</sup> Chief Justice of the Colony in 1814. Elephants were far more numerous in those days, and bags correspondingly larger, over two hundred animals being described by Sir Alexander's friend as to be seen within the kraal at one time on that occasion. The writer furnishes his friend with a most dramatic account of the scene, which, exciting and impressive as he found it, he characterises in no mincing language as "disgusting," while the wish is recorded that "some less cruel and more effectual manner" of inducing the animals to enter the inner enclosure could be invented. It takes pretty rough handling to cause a beast with such a physique as the elephant really serious injury, but Sir Alexander's informant reports many casualties in the final vanquishing and leading into captivity of that huge herd.

As a matter of fact there are always casualties, even if

<sup>1</sup> "The few scenes which I have selected from whole hecatombs of slaughter." (Preface to 1874 edition.)

<sup>2</sup> W. Williamson. Papers in possession of Mr. T. North Christie.

the captives number no more or fewer than a dozen. Apart from physical injuries suffered in the unequal contest the elephant is a sensitive beast, and takes any sort of ill-treatment very much to heart. There is no more pathetic sight on earth than a newly-shackled wild elephant brooding over his misfortunes, literally pouring dust upon his head, while often the older prisoners will lie down and deliberately die rather than submit to the ignominy of slavery. It may be argued that the services which his giant strength and vast intelligence will yield to man when once his free spirit has been broken are incalculable, but in Ceylon, at least, no one who knows anything about the matter will be foolish enough to argue that an elephant kraal is an economically justifiable undertaking, even when considerable damage to crops has been wrought in the neighbourhood, for the beast is a confirmed nomad, and ranges hundreds of miles of country in the year. Rather are these "kraals" (the word survives from the Dutch occupation of the colony) arranged every few years by leading Sinhalese landowners by reason of the entertainment they are presumed to afford for distinguished visitors than for profit. In a kraal held in recent years in the Southern Province, for instance, where I happened to be a spectator of the proceedings, the capture of seven elephants, not all of them saleable, made necessary the preliminary employment of some two thousand coolies for two months before the actual kraal, a large tract of virgin jungle having to be surrounded and "driven" with great wariness and deliberation, the watercourses moreover for miles round being diverted before the beaters began operations. Local food supplies have moreover fallen grievously behind demand these latter years in Ceylon, and one might have thought such huge assemblages of humble folk better employed in their own paddy fields, but the summons of

chieftain and headman to combined "Field Ops" of this type, possibly at the mere caprice of some still superior but unknown divinity, comes as a feudal rally which none dare ignore.

It was the strong pull of curiosity, however, coupled with the convenient invitation of one who owned a car wherein the backbone of a longish journey might be broken, and a fondness for further jungle peregrinations akin to my own, that drew me to attend a kraal, which report had it was about to be organised by a certain fierce and high-born ancient of lofty Kandyan lineage, who lorded it, greater despot than any Government agent or even governor, over forty thousand inaccessible acres of Sabaragamuwa forest held in direct fief from King George.

Early, therefore, one morning our car slid out of Colombo along the flat Kelani Valley Road, running smoothly between miles of flooded paddy fields, rustling coco-nut palms, and regimented rubber, through richly verdant Avisawella, on to Ratnapura at the foot of the Peak, city of gems, pilgrims, and mosquitoes, into a country where wild tangles of scrub marked how an orgy of old-time "chena" cultivation had turned league upon league of once virgin forest into a wilderness of matted thorns and weeds. On again to a rest-house and the road's end, Embilipitiya in fact, whereby a goodly stretch of drying paddy fields marked the last outpost of civilisation, home of the zigzagging snipe of which our guns took toll sufficient to make good the inadequacies of rest-house catering so very nearly off the map.

Thereafter a bath and bed, for we must be up with the sun. Even so we were, and in the dawn coolth went fowling again for our provender, such preying flesh-eaters are we, our quarry the exquisite green pigeon, and though to harry so lovely a creature put us to shame, yet man must live. The big and beautiful birds were here in



abundance, of a known excelling toothsome-ness, and the snipe had fled.

Breakfasted, we larded our unaccustomed feet and crawled like true Horatians three miles, fell out and crawled another three, ate more pigeons with our fingers for forks and found their toothsome-ness enhanced, and learned that our goal of Panamure lay still two miles farther on.

Honestly, those last miles from Embilipitiya were uncomfortable. The track was the roughest of bridle-paths, and to give an easier passage to the carriers the undergrowth had been cleared for two or three yards on either side by the simple process of burning. The acrid reek of still smouldering wood-ash acted as an intense irritant to palate and nostrils. Panamure lies in the heart of one of the driest and most parched districts in the island, and of cover the path had virtually none, wherefore the thirst acquired at the end of the tramp was simply colossal. Our eyes at least were refreshed at a point where, about a mile or so from Panamure village, we came suddenly at a turn of the path upon an exquisite little dagoba, the pure white of its delicate lines starting out against the rusty background of scorched vegetation with a suddenness that was surprising as it was delightful. Only a few minutes later we were able to revel in more material delights, for a visit of ceremony at the bungalow of the Ratamahatmaya, resplendent in European pyjamas adorned with gold and ruby buttons, resulted in the instantaneous and apparently magical appearance of divers goblets wherein "beaded bubbles winking at the brim" betokened, if not "the rare, the blushful Hippocrene," at least a beverage that was equally refreshing, and certainly as expensive. Our emotions were suitable to the occasion.

Over the discomforts of the ensuing night a veil is

drawn, but let it suffice that early next morning, while engaged in diligent inquiry concerning the expected time of kraaling, the number of elephants observed, and other details with which it was our manifest province to familiarise ourselves, there appeared far down the track a crate, coolie-borne, whose contours were familiar.

Our luggage.

. . . . .

The stockade enclosed an area of, it might be, some three acres or more, and everywhere the huge baulks of satinwood and ebony that formed the palisade (a Kandyan king's ransom, had this been the Colombo timber depot) had been reinforced where they showed signs of having suffered from the onslaughts of former captives and the ravages of a climate more destructive than even the local white ant, against whose depredations both these beautiful timbers happen to be proof. Jungle, of course, filled the actual enclosure, and signs of bygone trampling and destruction of the undergrowth there were none. Within the semi-gloom of the stockade, along the course of the stream whose ice-cool depths and shallows, scented from afar, were even now luring to their fate an unknown number of the most wily and sagacious beasts in creation, were revealed a multitude of beauty-spots. Water, rocks, gnarled boles and twisted creepers, foliage, sunshine and shadow, provided a succession of pictures whose loveliness it would be no exaggeration to call haunting. And through all these glades sailed great butterflies, black, yellow, blue and brown, while now and again a grey or cinnamon-tinted goblin went swinging and swishing through the tree-tops.

Away along the jutting-out wings of the stockade mouth began a trodden-down path, punctuated at every thirty yards or so with little heaps of grey ash and smouldering

logs, tended by shy and uncouth brown men who crouched, each beside a clumsy billhook, a sharpened stake, and a water-holding gourd shaped like a mammoth gherkin, under flimsy shelters of branches. This line of squatting figures made a great loop of eighteen miles or so, penning in two herds, or so they said.

A faint jungle breeze bore to us that night in kraal-town the wild cries of these beaters, and strange shrieks and hootings that might or might not have been the trumpeting of the encircled elephants a mile away.

Once a solitary bull, with whom it seemed the two herds known to be enclosed utterly refused to have anything to do, came crashing through the tangled brakes right up to the stockade, and sought repeatedly to find an opening that would make him free of the stream whose savour he had sniffed miles back, but the banging of gongs and the wild waving of torches of dried grass drove him back.

Kraal-town filled up rapidly in the next two days. A fat German brought a party of five, and disposed himself to rough it *en prince* with the aid of four tents, a half-company of long chairs, and apparently limitless commissariat resources. Another arrival in the course of the week-end was heralded by a long file of coolies bearing familiar-looking crates, and the rumour, "sixty dozen sodas!" flew round the camp. Some planting visitors revealed more spartan proclivities. An investigation of the available cubicles and an inquiry into the proposed charges not proving satisfactory, the two gentlemen retired to a secluded glade in the jungle, with much exertion erecting a little bower of twigs and leaves, in which rustic shelter they manfully passed the night oblivious of snakes, centipedes, scorpions, ticks, and the innumerable minor terrors of the forest.

Colour was lent to somebody's suggestion that kraaling was at last imminent by someone else's discovery of a gang

of coolies engaged in drilling the ground immediately about the main entrance to the kraal with small holes of three inches or so in diameter, each of which was carefully filled with water on completion, a cunning scheme for luring the oncoming thirsty herd into the path most convenient to their expectant captors for them to take. Increased activity was to be marked among the beaters.

Yet another dawn showed kraal-town wearing a most woebegone aspect.

We had arrived in high hopes of being able to witness within the next few hours at least one of the most interesting spectacles that a globe-trotter or anyone else could reasonably expect to enjoy. And now virtually every visitor who had been tempted to snatch a few days' respite from the daily round of *totum* or office, perhaps even then with a semi-guilty conscience, found himself faced with the conclusion that the only sensible thing to do was to throw up the whole business at once. Few untoward happenings are so vexatious as a spoiled picnic, and it was only the obvious zeal with which the final preparations for the reception and housing of the official guests were being pushed on that prevented a general exodus of disgruntled picnickers.

Kraaling, we were told, was really probable on the following evening, and it was obvious that those directing the operations knew more about the position and movements of the elephants and the chances of an early drive-in than they cared to tell us. But one more day passed without incident, and another was upon us. There were signs of unwonted activity about the kraal, a special notice-board curtailed our prowlings in the direction of the stockade, and word went round that a chastened post-prandial conviviality would be acceptable. The evening hours wore on, and at midnight we all went to

bed with our clothes on. Between 1 and 2 a.m. there were alarums and excursions, but, alas! no elephants.

The outlook grew daily less inspiring. If we were to believe reports, the kraal was "hung up" because the herd, suffering intensely as they must have been from thirst, had ranged themselves under the leadership of an old bull in a protective phalanx about a distracted cow elephant and her week-old baby. Despite the efforts of the beaters, the pace of the herd continued to resolve itself into the pace of the baby.

Just as we were abandoning hope—some had already left—Meedeniya Dissawe of the stout and genial presence materialised in our midst, and delivered himself of the positive assurance that the elephants would be in that night. We argued that after all he ought to know (it was *his* kraal), and hurriedly cancelled our preparations for flight. He did.

An hour after midnight came shouts and lights and scurrying feet, and kraal-town burst into wild activity. Showers of sparks from the torches borne ahead made the quarter-mile of path that separated us from the stockade a miniature Milky Way. The hoarse shouts of the beaters grew louder as we pressed forward, and where the path turned sharply from the stream under great trees we saw all at once the rude lattice of the stockade sharp-cut against a line of fire. The Ratamahatmaya was holding a little court around the foot of the steps leading to his own particular eyrie, while beyond some unseen chorister burst into an endless chant of triumph that rose and dropped in ululating quarter-tones which baffled European imitation. Sleepy-looking figures, with wild hair and strangely disordered array, poured up the path every minute, and the earliest announced that he had actually seen a captured wild elephant in the darkest corner of the stockade, a point at which we hurried to station ourselves. Round

the square, a triple ring beyond the fires and the palisade, were hundreds of beaters, each armed with a long spear (flimsy affairs; I brandished one myself), or a pole with sharpened point hardened in the fire. There was a tremendous hullabaloo in an adjoining corner, a crashing in the undergrowth ten yards away, and then, outlined against the glowing streak that marked the farther side of the enclosure, one, two, three, four great shapes shambled forward and were lost again.

Two of us perched for hours high up on the palisading, and as dawn drew on the great grey shapes that lumbered distractedly round and round the enclosure were more easily defined. Two were noticeably far bigger than the rest, and one was practically a baby. Their capture had been touch and go, for the biggest animal had pressed on and entered the enclosure an hour ahead of the rest; only a few beaters had as yet come in from the lines, no fires could be lit, nor could the gate be raised, and there was in consequence imminent risk of the whole herd escaping. Everything passed off successfully, however, and early in the morning urgent messages had already started five huge decoys on their way.

The noosing operations were in full swing long before mid-day, under the direction of a Sinhalese chief who was most amazingly adroit at this particularly difficult and dangerous branch of elephant-catching. Oil was rubbed on the heads of both the animals and their riders, and stout coils of new rope were tested with care before being pronounced fit for use. Then the small gate used by the decoys was opened, and the five mammoths entered, seeming twice if not thrice the size of their gaunt and hungry-looking brothers, who stood, suspicion in every line of ears and trunk, huddled within the thickest covert that the kraal afforded. The chase began at once, for the friendly brandishing of trunks on the part of the

decoys failed to deceive the captives for a second, and they wheeled round and crashed off, young trees snapping like pea-sticks. Running by their protecting decoys the noosers, with lightning work of hand and eye, got to business at once, and the hind-leg of a young but lusty and vigorous victim felt a sudden and inexorable strain that tightened with every wild kick he gave. Squealing with rage and pain, he was dragged in the most undignified manner, fighting every inch of the way, to the small stockade beneath the Ratamahatmaya's look-out, the path of his captor and himself looking like the wake of a small cyclone.

One after another the three smaller elephants shared the same fate, and despite bellowings, trumpeting, and wild strainings of huge limbs, were roped and double-roped by both hind-legs to trees in different parts of the enclosure. Contrary to expectations, an old cow—the largest of the herd after the *perily* bull, whose escape had been connived at just outside the stockade—gave least trouble. Once noosed, without a kick left in her she flopped on the ground, and for a time resisted every effort of the resourceful decoys to get her up again. Without avail they pushed and butted, and even when a noose was slipped over her head and the great decoy stood over her and lifted with all the power of his enormous muscles, she could not be got on her feet for twenty minutes or so. She seemed to realise that she was too old and tired to begin life all over again along entirely new and uncomfortable lines. Later they told us she had died while being led away through the jungle by her purchaser.

The liveliest struggle was provided by the last two animals captured, another big cow and her three-year-old calf, who was immediately christened Podinona. Both proved surprisingly nimble in eluding their pursuers, but at last the mother slackened her ambling trot sufficiently

to let the noose be dexterously slipped over her off hind-foot. Her fate was sealed. Bellowing and throwing her huge bulk madly against the pulling rope, she was dragged to the nearest tree and ruthlessly tied, while her distracted daughter blundered round among noosers and decoys in agonised clumsiness. Podinona's own turn had now come, and she was noosed in exactly half a minute. But she had a good deal to say about the matter, and her incessant screams of rage and courageous if futile charges on three legs against every nooser or spectator within sight won her a lot of sympathy.

The sight presented by the seven captives could not have been more pitiable. Shackled each to a stout tree that showed hardly a tremor at the occasional convulsive strainings of the prisoners, they stood in attitudes of the utmost dejection, trumpeting dolorously at intervals, and between whiles signalling their grief by throwing dust upon their heads. They had not long to wait for purchasers, and after one of the lustiest captives had been presented to the Dissawe as a recompense for the services of his noosers and decoys the rest were auctioned where they stood to a dozen eager buyers and hustled away along the jungle tracks, cowed and submissive, but still roped to the heaving bulks of the decoys.

There was one little scene to come, pathetic epilogue enough. Two miles out from camp, tramping the rough bridle-path by which we were to strike the nearest road, we stumbled upon the poor little dead body, its infantile rotundity clothed with a curious coat of black hair, a sort of elephantine down, of a week-old calf. It was, alas! Podinona's still younger brother, whose stumbling footsteps had delayed the earlier advance of the whole herd. The jungle rubric lays it down that in such emergencies the calf must be noosed by stealth and tied up, leaving its mother the choice of abandoning the herd or her



offspring. This ruling had been duly put into effect. The rope was still round the victim's neck, and in her frantic efforts to untie it overnight his mother had doubtless inflicted, all unwittingly, the injuries to which he had succumbed.

. . . . .

If you catch a bull elephant in his youth, hauling him off perhaps on three legs from the side of his mother as she droops disconsolate beneath the tree-trunk from which a six-fold coil of manila forbids her to stir, butt, hustle, and prod the frightened youngster along miles of jungle ways to a prison wherein you proceed to bully him for his good till he knows elephant discipline backwards and will fetch and carry like any retriever; if you feed, water, and groom him till he bulks in the course of years into a veritable prize elephant, overtopping by many inches all his brothers in Ceylon; if you assiduously seek to overlay the wondrous jungle wisdom of his kind with years of patient teaching in man's wisdom, in such intimate association as dispenses with the curtain masking the utter feebleness and futility of such devices as ropes, bonfires, muzzle-loaders, spears, and finally of that hoary fraud, "the power of the human eye"; if you add insult to injury by persuading him against his better feelings to play traitor to his own kith and kin till he knows more about the art and mystery of elephant-catching than the oldest mahout, have you really and truly tamed that elephant? In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the answer is probably yes. But there will always remain the outside chance that you have not. There is for instance the mysterious condition of elephantine nerves known as "musth." Of that you cannot know your Kipling and not be aware of its terrifying symptoms. Wise men tell us that it arises from periodic sexual

hysteria, and I think they may be right, while, judging from the measures he takes to deal with it, so does the Sinhalese mahout. It has been said, too, of elephants that they never forgive nor forget either kindness or injury. Even the Cockney-bred, bun-eating, pack animals at the Zoo are known to have their hours of neurasthenia, wherein their keeper moves gingerly and crab-wise about them, and will refuse to take passengers, taught by the crafty twinkle in Jumbo's eye that this morning it might amuse us to mistake a baby for a bun.

Anyway this is the tale of a hundredth case, and it concerns Billigamanaya the Magnificent, lord of all Ceylon elephants, a Colossus of his kind, master of all elephant craft, and hero of a hundred kraals. No less a one it was than this same Old Bill, a Titan in the prime of elephanthood, perfect and without blemish, who stood slowly fanning his vast ears one day in August 1920, when at the head of all the paraded decoys of Ceylon he strode into the enclosure of a memorable kraal in the Wannicountry, and bore a major and heroic part in the vanquishing and degradation of two score of his jungle brethren. Was it a judgment perhaps that decreed how an infuriated relative, his quarters jammed fast against a huge tree, ponderous but desperate writhings and heavings restrained by the buttings of a giant head, the stranglehold of a massive trunk, and the catch-as-catch-can footwork of his redoubtable persecutor, ably seconded as was this latter by a confederate tusker, should catch out of the tail of his angry eye a glimpse of that brush-tipped caudal whisk, lashing excitedly to and fro as that of any ratting terrier? And all's fair in catch-as-catch-can, so with trunk whipped free for a moment, here's a bit of our own back, and that bit no less than the authentic brush or tuft of Old Bill himself, with a bleeding eighteen inches of quivering tail attached. The big 'un *must* lose on points this round, so

hooray for another tail! A second flick, and it is the tusker's turn to trumpet an ignominious *Touché*.

O, shame! O, utter humiliation! Heavens, how smarts the dishonourable wound, and what in the name of Providence is to befall when in the hour of the siesta gathers the teasing cloud, the fly, the wasp, the hornet, and the blundering buzzing cohorts of all the winged pygmies with their lances, to trouble the peace of moments sacred to rocking introspection, when no plumed flail serves automatically to keep the torture-swarms at bay!

But observe how deep into the soul even of a Colossus enters the iron of discipline. Old Bill and his stout lieutenant carried on with the job of tying up that lashing, tail-tweaking, low-down jungle wallah of an elephant, till he had about as much kick left in him as a trussed turkey. Through with it, they retired in good order, though scarcely with "tails up." A good-plucked one, Old Bill, for an hour or so later saw him re-enter the arena. But if he made a brave show at butting, thwacking, and pushing the remaining captives into surrender, he had obviously lost his dash. That afternoon saw from him no more prodigies of valour, no more master-moves of kraal-craft, the really awkward jobs fell to lesser paladins. On the fringe of the fray rather than in the thick of it, he flapped moodily a ridiculous pendulum, knobbed absurdly with cotton-wool and lint.

Now, if ever, was the time for tactful sympathy and a considerate demeanour on the part of his own particular mahout, though otherwise, alas! it was to fall out. Old Bill, who with his rider strode in his rightful place at the head of the procession which defiled before honourable guests after all was over, seemed tractable, but when his mahout halted him for the night at the temporary stables at Ambanpola, a few miles down the road, and offered him pails of water lashed with arrack and an armful of

lush greenery, he butted all aside and sulked in his stall. Then it was that his mahout abandoned discretion. Great doings there are among the fraternity at the wind-up of such a kraal as yields five and thirty elephants, and it is much to be feared that Old Bill's attendant that night twined vine-leaves in his hair. The Sinhalese have a child-like fondness for "dressing up" on all and sundry occasions of celebration, and what must this fool mahout do but clap upon his silly head a fearsome devil-dancer's mask and assume withal the wild and wonderful habiliments pertaining thereto. In this guise, then, rather of a fiend from the Buddhist Inferno than of his accustomed self, did the crazy wretch appear in Bill's stable to tuck in his charge, as it were, for the night, even, as they say, mopping, mowing, and anticking before a creature now very sore and savage, the pain of his wound growing upon him with the hurt to his pride. Further details are unnecessary; but the case remains a clear one of *felo de se*.<sup>1</sup>

It is, in point of fact, an extremely rare occurrence for an elephant to kill its keeper, even in one of its periodic frenzies. No wonder then that the assembled mahouts and their Ambanpola *convives*, already a little unbalanced by the excitement of the occasion, should have proceeded to raise Cain as tidings of bloody happenings at the stables ran like wildfire round the hamlet. Old Bill's attendant keeper heard and ran, brave lad, straight to drag the poor earth that was his friend beyond reach of further indignity, and to rail objurgations and gabble charms to which the only response was the vicious flip of a trunk that sandbagged the wits out of him. He lived, by a miracle.

Thereupon the village tucked up its *comboys* and ran as one man, woman and child. After a little byplay with

<sup>1</sup> A sentimental rider to this story as now told by the stable folk is that the fall of the mask revealed to Billigamanaya the identity of his victim, whose remains he then covered tenderly with the green leaves offered to him earlier as provender.

the doorposts after the manner of Samson, Billigamanaya ran too.

Daybreak rallied the reassembled mahouts to a council of war, the upshot a coming and going from the hastily shifted stables, the bringing up of a young and sportive cow from the ranks of the decoys, and her tethering in a patch of jungle wherein Old Bill had last been glimpsed and heard, breathing threatenings and slaughter. Unfortunately for an industrious English planter who shall be known as B., the stage for the sylvan idyll wherein these strategists had hoped to entangle the outlaw's errant feet and through which it was hoped he might be weaned gently from his present mood of extreme bloodthirstiness into the paths of peace, was set upon land immediately adjoining the new bungalow and plantations of the aforesaid B., at that moment actually in occupation with his wife and daughter, the family having been spectators at the kraal. Nice for them, was it not? Anyway it seems likely that none of the three will forget the next two nights' experiences as long as they live.

Though panic continued to rage in Ambanpola, there was little real danger to the villagers, the place having grown a swarming, noisy caravanserai of camp followers from kraalstown, roaring night-long with innumerable fires. Different was the plight of the unfortunate B. and the ladies of his household. Their position realised, the fact of the cow having just been tethered, stupidly, within earshot of the house itself, that a completely unmanageable and maddened elephant, the largest, strongest, and most courageous animal in the country, was making his near presence so obvious with trumpetings and bellowings of fury as effectually to deter any attempt at freeing the wretched cow, that the bungalow walls afforded about as much protection as a matchbox, and that there was only one rifle among the party, the only step to minimise their

peril that could be taken was to collect every available stick and shred of inflammable stuff at hand, ring the house about with bonfires, line every veranda and window with lamps and candles, abandon thoughts of bed, and sit up hoping for the best. They did so till midnight, when, as luck would have it, the last bonfire flickered out. Not one shaving of fuel, one single dried cadjan of coco-nut leaves, was left to feed the blaze. Nobody moved, a whole interminable hour went by, and nothing whatever happened.

It was then, without so much warning as the snapping of a twig without, that a perfectly horrific blast of trumpeting set every piece of furniture in the place a-rattle, and startled two already distraught women nearly out of their lives. B. sprang to the back veranda, to behold something the size of a haystack project itself through his garden fence with an ear-splitting rip of timbers. A drifting cloud passed, and clear in the moonlight stood Billigamanaya, ears cocked forward and trunk sky-pointing, heading straight for the bungalow at a walk that B. looked momentarily to see break into a charge that must bring the house down. Caprice or some distraction, it may have been a hanging bunch of plantains, halted the fateful on-drawing at a tree twenty paces short of the veranda (measured afterwards). B.'s womenfolk could only cower on the floor within, helpless to make any move towards safety, while their sole protector, wide-eyed and motionless, stood sentry behind a screen on the veranda, rifle in hand, torn by the distracting alternatives of whether to shoot or not to shoot. Most luckily he held his hand.

For Old Bill, it seemed, was more hungry for the succulent sweets, the juicy fibrousness and mushy soul-comforting pulp of the plantains, pineapples, papaws and other luscious delights which with his still upturned and tremulous trunk he savoured everywhere about him, than athirst for

more human blood. Wherefore he laid about heartily and with good will, benefiting exceedingly by a whole season's industry on the part of B. and his labour force, only mindful of his wrongs at occasional moments, when a fitful bellow would send the hearts of the still immobile watchers once more into their mouths. Towards dawn his peripatetic gourmandisings had carried him to a point where B. deemed it just safe to send his daughter and a servant scurrying down the front garden path to Ambanpola village. Old Bill winded this first escape and whirled quickly about, viewing the bungalow and whatever it might contain with profound and suspicious disfavour. Reassured by the absence of sound or movement, he again sheered off a little later, when, greatly daring, B. and his wife stole off in stockinged feet and won to safety in the village, where they found the school-house a fortress crammed with terrified villagers.

Rounding up a few stalwarts, B. cautiously approached his homestead at the first streak of dawn. The house still stood, though "pugs" the size of tea-trays revealed themselves within five yards of the front door, whereas of a year's planting, literally hundreds of choice fruit trees, what seemed a barrage of H.E. had swept the entire compound flat.

Next morning saw the indomitable B. in command of some half-dozen of retainers, once again prepared to contest with the still vagrant Bill the right of every Englishman to consider his house his castle. It was thought better on this occasion to dispense with lights, which obviously had no terrors for so sophisticated a marauder. This time, again without any preliminary warning whatsoever, a vague immensity suddenly blotted out the moonlight, a vast head, trunk and foot were actually thrust within the veranda, several yards of tatting were torn down and trampled on with snorts of disgust, an

inquiring proboscis with its quivering finger curled snakily into the front room, tapped and scraped chairs and tables within inches of the observers, and was withdrawn.

Not unwisely, B. evacuated the bungalow with the morning light, there being no doubt that Old Bill intended to make the garden his headquarters, the shade and food obtainable being to his liking and the tank conveniently adjacent for bathing purposes. It took him two days to polish off the fruit, and on the third he started systematically on the many-acred vegetable plot.

Bill, in fact, was rapidly becoming a notoriety. For three days now telegraph wires had been busy, dozens of decoys and their mahouts were marshalled in the villages, subordinate Government officials wired innumerable instructions that were forthwith countermanded by their superiors, contradictory chits and orders flew back and forth—"capture," "capture without shooting"—"shoot without killing," "shoot," "don't shoot," "protect Mr. B.'s property," and every conceivable futility. One wonders that the distracted Ratemahatmaya whose province it was to translate these instructions into action was not driven to suicide.

Bill ought, of course, to have been shot, by which I mean shot at determinedly under organised direction until he was dead. He had already killed one man, half killed another, and was obviously out to kill some more. Against this it was pleaded that his intrinsic value in life was greater than that of any other elephant in the colony. They argue thus queerly sometimes in Ceylon.

So further tragedy befell, and yet again tragedy.

Bill spent much time that week wallowing in the tank and shambling in aimless comings and goings from the bund, something of a cripple now, for final official orders having crystallised into "shoot in the legs—not to kill," were subscribed to with the collective animosity of a whole



countryside. Slings, stones, scrap-iron, and spearheads, gashed, tore, and scarified his monolithic limbs till his chargings were but feeble half-hearted efforts. Crippled, however, he seemed more blindly ferocious than ever, which is perhaps no cause for wonder. Mankind had set its hand collectively against him, but mankind was still mightily afraid of him. Hundreds of villagers haunted the bund, unsafe as it was to linger while drawing water from this sole village supply. None dared stand up, and whenever the intruder scented an enemy and charged up the slope, the line of curious heads disappeared like rabbits, to follow a helter-skelter sliding and scurrying into safety. Balked and thwarted, Bill turned with monotonous regularity to vent his spleen upon the unfortunate cow. No one could get near enough to untie her, and she played the part of whipping-girl for over a week, smarting under merciless belabourings of Bill's terrible trunk. Great and increasing were the proffered rewards for capture, for Old Bill's owners yearned unceasingly for his return to sanity and usefulness, pulling every imaginable string to avert his destruction. Twice he was noosed with a wire hawser, to snap his bonds like so much packthread. Witch-doctors and enchanters mumbled incantations and charms by the score, and one prophet stood up boldly and called on men to leave Billigamanaya in peace, for the next rash adventurer to interfere with him would assuredly perish.

And so it happened. Amid the tangled wreckage of B.'s garden another mahout fumbled with a noose, slipped, was caught about the middle by the whirling, lashing trunk, pitched skywards and trampled as he fell to a jelly. Then they tried traps, all manner of traps, a hewn kitul tree, its crown sodden with sweet sap, laid crosswise on the bund with a noose cunningly attached, but Old Bill sniffed at it, knew it for a fraud, lifted it gingerly by one end, at once detected the rope, which he picked up most

delicately with the finger of his trunk and flung violently from him, then pushed the remainder of the contraption contemptuously into the tank. He then paced backwards and forwards over the spot, taking precautions against any further trap that were positively amazing, lifting his legs high like a cat on hot bricks, moving only one foot at a time, and pausing for several seconds after each separate step. Other devices, even more elaborate, were spotted out of hand and dodged with a snort of contempt.

And still the colossal price set on his head prompted the more desperate spirits among the mahouts to essay Old Bill's capture by the ordinary methods of hand-noosing from the ground. Harried and distressed by the attentions of a handful of such reckless adventurers, he one morning plunged down the bund to drink. With incredible courage one mahout followed, and actually clutched what was left of the refugee's tail, hung on valiantly and shouted for ropes. None was brave or quick enough to act with sufficient promptitude, and Old Bill, cunning as ever, pushed deeper into the lake instead of rounding upon his tormentor as the latter had expected and trying to reach him with his trunk on dry land. Actually, too, it was the very disability suffered by Old Bill just previous to his lapse, and largely as one may assume the cause of it, that bereft that singularly gallant mahout of his one chance of life. Desperate as was his hold, his clutching fingers slipped down and ever down the creature's tail, now wet and slippery with water and mud, till, behold, there was no tail, no stout tuft of bristles to afford a final life-saving grip, only a shred of raw hide and flesh that whipped through his fingers. Dropping to his knees in the shallow water, the wretched creature flung his arms to Heaven and shrieked, "Aiyo, Eliya, Aiyo!" ("Alas, O Elephant!")

Old Bill killed him with a horrible deliberation which

I will not describe. What was left he held high out of the water for all to see, and then flung from him to the very crest of the bund.

Then, and only then, they left him more or less alone, and one day another mahout (and for the cunning and valour of the brotherhood I know no word that is too high of praise) seated himself in a tree with a bunch of plantains, tossed them to Old Bill as he limped by, tried him with half a dozen words of command in the elephant language, found no fault in his responsive comings, goings and whatnot of the drill, dropped quietly on his shoulders, and so, without fuss or parade, while none looked on, rode Billigamanaya back to his stable.

. . . . .

The annual festival of Esala Perahera at Kandy in August 1921 was the occasion of another mahout being killed by an elephant. No better story of the tragedy could be told than that provided by the coroner's evidence, which leaves, I think, a doubt in favour of the elephant as to whether the conduct of its keeper may not have been at least partly responsible for what occurred.

The following evidence was recorded at the inquest:

Bokote Punchirala stated: "I am about eighteen years old, and an elephant-keeper at Hurikaduwa. I have been employed to collect food for the elephants belonging to Mr. Halangode for the last eight months. The name of the elephant is Wela. Kiribanda had been keeper for the last ten years. The elephant has never done any injury to Kiribanda since he took him in charge, but previous to that it killed a keeper. I never approached the animal unless the keeper was on its back. No one, besides the keeper, could approach the animal. The villagers knew the animal and no one would approach him. Four days ago the elephant was brought from Hurikaduwa

to Hapukote, Kundadeniya, for the purpose of the Perahera. He was brought to Kandy for three days including yesterday. Last evening we left Hapukote about 5 p.m., followed a long way behind by about six other elephants, all for the Perahera. From the time I began supplying food for the animal it had done no injury or chased anyone. Last evening we came up as far as the toddy tavern at Mahayawa till the elephants from Katugastota way had assembled. The elephant was bathed at about 3 p.m. Before that Kiribanda drank a bottle of sweet toddy. After the bath the elephant was brought straight up to Mahayawa. Kiribanda was on the elephant while I followed on foot. After we came to Mahayawa, Kiribanda got down. He went back to the elephant and ordered him to raise his front foot for Kiribanda to get up. The elephant raised its front leg. Kiribanda held its ear and was about to mount when the elephant pitched its foot and Kiribanda was thrown about ten feet away. The elephant then rushed at him and pressed its curled trunk on the man and pushed him farther. We, who were close by, made a noise and threw stones at him. The elephant then chased me. I ran down the road. Seyathu then spoke to the animal, and he chased Seyathu. I then called out and he chased me. Then Seyathu removed Kiribanda to another spot. The elephant then came running towards Kandy; I followed the elephant for some distance and went back. I found no injuries on Kiribanda, but he was very bad. He could not say what was the matter with him. He desired that he should be sent to the hospital. There were two police constables on the spot. They engaged a rickshaw and sent the man to the Kandy Hospital. When this elephant became uncontrollable there were about ten other animals. All these animals were kept on opposite sides to prevent an attack. I cannot say that the deceased, Kiribanda, was drunk."

Mahommed Allah Pitche Saibo, Police Constable, No. 2076, stated: "The Reserve Sergeant of the Kandy Police Station directed me to go to Mahayawa, and, after all the elephants had assembled there, to accompany them to Kandy for the Perahera. About four or five elephants were ready to go to Kandy. This elephant that did the mischief followed them. There were ten others that followed this animal. I was following the last batch of elephants when I saw the deceased attempt to mount the animal by holding its ear. I then saw the animal pitch its keeper. I saw it curl its trunk and hit the man several times. Another elephant-keeper spoke to the animal. It then turned and chased him. I asked a bystander to remove the injured man to a side. The elephant ran towards Kandy. I engaged a rickshaw and sent the injured man to the Kandy Hospital. I cannot say whether the injured man was in liquor. I had no time to examine him, as I had to follow the remaining elephants to the Perahera. When I first saw this elephant it was quiet, but afterwards it looked ferocious and angry. I do not know why the animal charged its keeper. I did not see him do anything to the animal to rouse its temper."

The House Surgeon, Kandy Civil Hospital, deposed that death was due to shock as a result of injuries caused by the elephant.

The Coroner's finding was as follows: "I find that the elephant-keeper, Kiribanda, died of shock, as the result of injuries caused by the elephant. I cannot say that the animal was in 'musth.' Evidently he nourished a grudge for some previous ill-treatment, and this was the result."

The mahout died at the Civil Hospital at Kandy the same night. The truant did not return to his stables as was first imagined, but took possession of a patch of scrub adjoining his tethering ground, whence he made occasional inroads on the village crops, but was captured in a day or

two without further mishap, though not before, with Billigamanaya's exploits fresh in mind, an unholy scare had been aroused among the citizens of Kandy.

You can tame, or make a bid at taming, other beasts than the Ceylon elephant, if you be so minded. I once, for instance, bought for ten rupees in the veranda of the Ratnapura Club an eighteen-inch crocodile who took kindly to domesticity in a small cistern of masonry arranged for his requirements in my Colombo garden. Wire netting divided him from certain finny lodgers in the same domicile who, when they deserted the safe cover of the lotus pods and swam through the meshes into his territory, certainly suffered for their pains, such conduct being clearly asking for trouble. Though fed much and often, he never appeared to grow, remaining, however, true to the customs of his tribe in that he preferred his game high, taking such lumps of meat as were deposited on his raft only when none was looking, poking them carefully into an improvised larder of wire netting, and regaling himself upon them after the lapse of many days. He was still there when the war broke up our household, but a flaring bed of cannas now occupies the site of his tenement. The next occupier, I believe, owned a favourite kitten of a too exploring habit.

But if *Crocodylus palustris*, the tank crocodile or Indian Muggar, whose range is confined to India and Malaya, will suffer himself to be thus semi-domesticated, I doubt if you could do as much with *C. porosus*, the Estuarine crocodile who lurks in every tidal river and lagoon from the east coast of Ceylon to North Australia and Fiji. An inveterate man-eater, he is far more formidable than his sluggish tank-abiding cousin, though there are certain Low-country lakes and watercourses for whose occupants

the inhabitants have an exaggerated respect, whereas elsewhere they will freely swim and bathe in waters known to be swarming with *C. palustris*. *C. porosus*, I should add, is of a slenderer and more agile habit, and runs up to twenty feet in length to his cousin's fifteen, the world's record specimen I believe being no less than thirty-three feet long. A post-mortem on an average Ceylon specimen of *C. palustris* will seldom reveal any gruesome relics, his fare obviously consisting in the main of fish and frogs, and his stomach generally containing a handful or more of good-sized pebbles, doubtless to assist his digestive processes. Formidable as are his teeth, he can do no more than grip and drown his prey with them, and swallows his food in unmasticated chunks. His tenacity of life is amazing, and an ostensibly stone-dead crocodile should be approached with great care, on land his tail being the part of him to be most feared. His hide, however, is by no means bullet-proof, though no doubt it was so in old muzzle-loading days, and Sir Samuel Baker himself speaks of having seen a native drive his knife clean through the toughest part of a crocodile's back with one powerful thrust. No one quite knows how long an individual of either species lives in the wild state, though the Arabs have it that one crocodile will haunt the same sand-bank during the lifetime of a man. Report says that one or both species incubates its eggs, but good evidence of such philoprogenitive instinct is hard to come at.

Should your taste in pets run on more conventional lines, it is an easy thing to gratify it. Few of the beautiful and interesting bird species of Ceylon but will take happily to life in a large and roomy aviary of a type whose erection is no matter of difficulty even in Colombo, provided always that a sufficiency of their proper food is forthcoming. Living trees and shrubs, or creepers, should be an integral feature of such a domicile, with a natural or, if this is

unobtainable, an artificial pool for bathing and drinking purposes. Herein you may observe and even encourage to breed the Madras bulbul, the Indian black cuckoo, sometimes miscalled the "brain-fever bird," the true owner of that title being another Ceylon cuckoo of a somewhat aquiline build, who at certain seasons repeats his monotonous crescendo (some three parts of an octave, but never quite the whole of it) from every grove and garden; mynahs, barbets, and many varieties of the gorgeous Ceylon kingfishers (most of whom seem to get on very well in places where there are obviously no fish), the exquisite "bronzewing" and other indigenous doves, the green pigeon and the incomparable "pompadour," and even the whistling teal, whose adroitness on the wing is such that you need not pinion him as is advisable with the larger and clumsier ducks.

Of the 240 species of birds known to breed in Ceylon at least forty are peculiar to the island (in the United Kingdom we have exactly one, the red grouse). This fact in itself is strong presumptive evidence for the argument now being put forward by ornithologists that in tropical countries the proportion of migratory species is *pro rata* less than in the temperate zone. One authority<sup>1</sup> insists that in the habit of "loitering" after the natural period for migration has set in may be traced the intermediate steps "by which all along the tropics new resident species are being evolved from northern forms by the gradual breaking down of the migratory habit among a proportion of the birds of any species."

I am not certain whether the various species of Ceylon *Bucerotidus*, those large ungainly creatures known to popular fame as the hornbill family, are actually indigenous, but they are certainly worth studying should your jungle rambles give you an opportunity of making their

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Wait, C.C.S. ("Spolia Zeylanica").



acquaintance. *Bucerotidus* is the possessor of veritable eyelashes. I cannot say that it is certain he uses these for nictitative purposes, but I should never be surprised at a report that he had been observed to do so, in view of his extraordinary treatment of his fair partner and spouse, whom upon the slightest indication that her domestic instincts are about to develop he will instantly proceed to wall up in a hollow tree, a practice suggesting the medieval fate of flighty nuns and frail princesses, but never, so far as reported, deserved in the case of the female hornbill, and needlessly complicating, as it may be presumed, the ordinary tribulations of family life and imperiling the health of the whole family. Repetitions of this sort of Prussianism through many generations seem, however, to have inured hornbill *mère et fils* to such hardship.

If the sort of experiences that make your flesh creep and your hair stand on end have for you as for some people a kind of fearful fascination, do please try and hear a devil-bird. Sit up for one if anybody tells you that he is about, but try and remember not to get really frightened. It is the sort of noise that I won't attempt to describe. Any really apt simile would be too harrowing even to put before you in print. For scientific conjectures as to which or what bird (if it is a bird) is responsible for this diablerie, you cannot do better than to refer to Mr. Wait, who in *The Owls and Diurnal Birds of Prey found in Ceylon*<sup>1</sup> discusses this ancient mystery, being seemingly of opinion that the "Devil Bird's" cries vary considerably, and are more likely than not made by more than one species.

In the northern forests [he says] the cry usually heard is a loud, piercing, single scream, which is audible at a great distance. The villagers in the interior of the Puttalam District ascribe this call, not to an owl, but to the crested hawk-eagle, *S. cirrhatus*, and I believe that in some cases they are right. I have heard

<sup>1</sup> "Spolia Zeylanica."

this cry at night in the North-Central Province, and although the effect was blood-curdling, there was a ring in it not altogether unlike the ordinary notes of an eagle. The calls described by other observers in the central and southern parts of the island differ so much from this cry that they seem fairly obviously to be uttered by some other bird, and it is not improbable that more than one species is responsible. Four owls are held in suspicion. Native legends and beliefs point to the brown wood-owl, *S. indrani*, a fairly common, large species. Its ordinary note is a resounding "too-who," but tame birds have been known to utter dismal wailing sounds (*vide* Legge's *Birds of Ceylon*, p. 158, where the question is discussed at some length). Another bird with equal claims is the forest eagle-owl, *H. nepalensis*. There is in the Colombo Museum a skeleton of this owl, presented by J. H. Stephens, who stated that he shot it while uttering the cries of the devil-bird. It is, however, a rare species in Ceylon, though the few specimens recorded come from widely distributed localities, both in the hills and in the low country. Others, again, state that the devil-bird is a small whitish bird, which would point to the Ceylon bay owl, *P. sasimilis*. This is also a rare bird peculiar to Ceylon, and as yet recorded only from the hills and from the forest at their bases. An allied species from Northern India, *P. badius*, is said to make an appalling noise. The latter two species are probably genuine devil-birds, but as they are either rare or restricted in range, and as the devil-bird's cries are reported from all over the island, I cannot imagine that they are the sole authors of the ill-omened sounds. Lastly, the brown hawk-owl, *N. scutulata*, a small species found all over the island, is mentioned by several Indian observers as making noises like a strangled cat or a hare caught by hounds. It has not, however, been regarded with suspicion in Ceylon.

Though a mongoose in a bungalow is a nuisance, so long as any article you happen to value remains to be knocked over, the tribal vendetta which his kind wages against snakes and other vermin may be put to good use, while his personal devotion to his owner will grow to be such as frequently becomes embarrassing. Or you may make a pet of the Ceylon loris, a furry spider-like goblin

with eyes like huge lamps. He is difficult to feed, however, and should you disturb him overmuch in daylight he will first sulk and ultimately pine and languish away altogether in a sort of melancholic neurasthenia. So long as you keep his hours and respect his prejudices he will deign to accept at your hands an infinity of grasshoppers, an occasional small bird (of which he will bite off the head only), and any number of geckos that you put up within his range. My advice to you, however, is to spare the gecko, who does his best at keeping down your mosquito population, and whose joyful cry as he pouches the errant termite and drops its unpalatable wings upon the table encourages conversation at the dullest dinner parties.

Some say the miniature mouse deer makes a delightful pet, though he reminds me too much of the tiny hairless dogs which I hold in detestation. Others keep hares, dull and brainless creatures devoid of charm, or even short-nosed fruit bats, though endless plantains are expensive unless you happen to own a grove of them. All members of the bat and flying fox families moreover are disgustingly verminous, and should never be handled.

. . . . .

My friends the Fortescues were nice, kind people, with a bungalow overrun by pet animals, and a disinclination for bullying their servants which many of their friends denounced as weak and impolitic. Their menagerie was constantly being added to, their retinue never suffered to diminish, in no matter what enormities of conduct the personnel of either might from time to time be detected.

When Vellu the cook gave notice, Mrs. Fortescue nearly cried.

Certainly Vellu was quite apologetic about it.

"Very good master, very kind lady," but there was a

reason, elicited only by firm questioning to the accompaniment of sheepish grins and much squirming on Vellu's part, why it was unavoidable that master and lady should resign themselves to the loss of his services. His old father, way back on his "coast" in Tinnevely, had bestowed Vellu's hand in marriage (prior consultation not being considered necessary) on a beauteous damsel of the neighbourhood, a virgin young (report said about three and a half years), beautiful, and the daughter of a fellow-landowner (holding, that is to say, a share as to one-twenty-fifth in three perches of first-rate paddy land). It was auspicious, nay, necessary, that Vellu should catch the next Tuticorin boat, repair to the land of his fathers, and get properly triced up with such pomp, ceremony, and public and private feastings and junketings as befitted the standing of his family in society.

Master wrote a wonderful eulogy in Vellu's registration book, and presented him with his wages to date and a generous wedding gratuity, while lady furtively subscribed an extra ten rupees on the veranda. With a series of profound salaams, Vellu departed.

The necessity of advertising for a new cook became apparent.

The lot descended upon Charles Perera. Lady fell for his little horned comb of Galle tortoiseshell, his beaming countenance, and the spotless purity of his cloth and tunic. Master was a little less enthusiastic, deeming Charles a trifle uppish and garrulous. He certainly had rather good "certificuts," and appeared to know it.

Anyway, he got the job.

That very day the Fortescue menagerie received a new recruit. Mrs. Toppett-Wyndham, who was going Home in a hurry to sample a new process of combined electrolysis and permanent waving ("A perfect genius, my dear. Have you seen what he's done for the Golightly woman?"),

dispatched her garden coolie to the Fortescue bungalow with a large cupola-shaped cage and a sprawling chit.

"Darling," it said, "I know Gigadibs'll be comfy with you. Don't forget that he only likes the best mangos. Early mangosteens and Kew pines are good for him, too."

Gigadibs was a scraggy brute of a parrot, with the temper of a fiend, an ear-splitting screech, and a Gargantuan appetite for the most expensive varieties of fruit. Mrs. Fortescue bore with his tantrums, however, and even made pathetic attempts to cure him of swearing.

There were so many animals in the place now that some of the heavier "keeper" work fell perforce to Charles Perera.

Late one Saturday afternoon the Fortescue rickshaws bowled back from the club, and Master and Lady hopped nimbly to the veranda. Twenty minutes to dress, men coming to dinner, and a dance afterwards.

"*Bob!*" screamed Mrs. Fortescue. "Look at Gigadibs!"

Gigadibs sagged limply on his hoop, without a screech or curse left in him. His eagle eye was sullen and dejected. His whole bearing resembled that of a human being sickening for 'flu. Mutely, his gaze implored quinine, blankets, a hot-water bottle. Such feathers as he had were up-ended, tousled, clammy, yes, certainly clammy.

A fearful thought struck Mrs. Fortescue. She clapped her hands and screamed, "Charles!"—but there was Charles at her elbow, a little nervous and self-conscious.

"Did you——?" she said. "Have you——?"

No need to ask. The house coolie peeped round the end of the veranda, in his hand the tin of dog-soap, over his arm an obviously damp towel.

"Lady always saying washing dogs," muttered Charles, shifting from one bare foot to the other. "I very good cook. Have got certificut."

Mrs. Fortescue nearly sacked him, but her husband restrained her.

He preferred to lose Mrs. Toppett-Wyndham.

. . . . .

Prowling the brink of one of Ceylon's innumerable lagoons, you may chance upon *Gelasimus*, the fiddler crab, with his one claw or "cheliped," which is so vastly bigger than the other that he can use it either as an umbrella or a front door. One Ceylon naturalist spent an instructive afternoon observing the habits of *Gelasimus* near Lake Tamblegam. He declares that the females showed themselves far more venturesome than the males, and their incessant voyages of discovery from the family burrow were the source of intense consternation to their spouses, who exhibited frantic excitement, stood on tip-toe on the front door-step, and waved their conspicuous chelipeds in the air. The fair object of these signals of distress appeared, or so it seemed, to be rather frightened or annoyed by them, exactly which it was difficult to tell. The males repeatedly tried to head their venturesome spouses off, but made no attempt to lay hands, or rather chelipeds, upon the truant, who ultimately wandered away, to what dangerous cross-roads of crustacean destiny neither the textbooks nor our patient observer are in a position to inform us.

A venerable Ceylon planter, once a homeward fellow-passenger of mine, had an intriguing story about a *tic polonga*, (Russell's viper) which he swore was genuine. The snake began its adventures by recovering after having lain apparently dead for a month with its head battered by a stone. Later it was sent to a lady naturalist, and was mislaid on the journey for two months without food or drink, at the end of which fast its late master found it disporting itself in its prison full of life and vigour. As it

was obvious that the first thing the captive both desired and deserved was a meal, he offered it a squirrel that he had just shot. This was swallowed in a flash, whereupon the snake gratefully accepted a drink of water. In the next five days five more squirrels were similarly assimilated without effort, and only then did it appear to have had enough. Subsequently the snake continued to flourish as more or less of a pet for several years, during which its meal times were probably better regulated.

Planting councils in Ceylon have lately been agitated by the misdemeanours of an undesirable alien in the person of the so-called Kalutara snail. Why the Planters' Association (parliament of all the planting brotherhood, which assembles in periodic session at Kandy) should have decided, as they did in 1920, that no useful purpose was to be served by officially proclaiming *Achatina fulica* as a pest is not clear, but estate managers and horticulturists generally who speak from what they know themselves of the damage wrought by his depredations, for he has carried his policy of peaceful penetration throughout the colony to an extent which in a short five years or so has made him a ubiquitous feature of the rural landscape in most fertile districts of the island, have certainly learnt to look upon him as an unqualified nuisance. The Government entomologist in his desire to help even went lately to the length of drawing up a list of what were alleged to be the best practical means of keeping the snail's ravages within bounds. He seems to have found some difficulty in improving upon such usual rough-and-ready methods as crushing, boiling, burning, and burying the marauder wherever found, without distinction of age or sex as the atrocity-mongers have it, but certainly supplemented his plan for a destructive campaign with suggestions of a prophylactic nature, recommending the protection of

small vegetable gardens and plots by enclosing them with perpendicular-sided ditches in which a mixture of saw-dust, ashes, and lime had been sprinkled, and branding the trunks of individual trees and other valuable plants with freshly tarred coco-nut fibre. The plan of his purely offensive campaign, I should add, was prefaced with the incontrovertible announcement that "the simplest way of controlling the snail is by destroying it." So far as it went, no advice could have been better. Expert authority, however, went farther, and enumerated a diversity of methods which might be employed to this end with every chance of success. It appeared that having caught your snail, several means were open to you for hurrying your captive into eternity, all equally effective. You might (i) jump on it, (ii) drop it into boiling water, (iii) catch several more snails and make a holocaust of the lot with some dead leaves and a match-box, (iv) bury it alive. Tender-hearted people who held that some of these devices were too suggestive of Leninism advised the more civilised and it was claimed equally effective plan of tickling the back of the trespasser with a straw held in one hand while simultaneously offering it a poisoned lettuce-leaf with the other, it being common knowledge that simple and confiding creatures like snails would always be counted on to succumb to strategy of this sort.

Speaking seriously, however, something will have to be done in the way of keeping these prolific gastropods from multiplying themselves indefinitely, physiological particulars supplied by the naturalists enabling thoughtful students to perceive that every snail of this order has exactly four times as many opportunities for paternity as are open to his fellow-beasts. As to this the Government entomologist claims to be experimenting with certain poisons applied either to the snails themselves or to their favourite vegetables. Meanwhile private



enterprise does what it can. One planter has been carrying the war into the enemy's country by organising snail drives in the Kelani Valley during the last few years which have effected a marked reduction in the number of the pest locally and a corresponding benefit to the coolie gardens of the district. There is, moreover, a rod in pickle for the enemy which has not yet been exhaustively tested, though its advocates claim that its effect when fully in operation will be devastating. A certain fire-fly larva known as *Lamprophorus tenebrosus*, of predatory and carnivorous habits, is alleged to bear *Achatina* an undying grudge, holding itself perpetually on the look out for chances of satisfying the same. The scientific staff have not yet reported as to its precise method of attack, which some assumed to be analogous to that of the ichneumon fly, who lays her eggs in the body of certain caterpillars upon whose living flesh the remorseless infants proceed to batten when hatched. On the other hand, a planter of my acquaintance once informed me that he had witnessed a Homeric struggle under a cocoa tree in which a particularly combative *Lamprophorus* had locked the protruding portions of *Achatina's* anatomy in a ju-jitsu grip, and with forelegs braced on the rim of his victim's shell was slowly dragging the reluctant gastropod from his retreat in a grim and businesslike fashion recalling the way of the blackbird with his early worm.

Why *Achatina* should be fathered upon so wideawake and generally up-to-date a district as Kalutara seems a little hard upon this enlightened district, though the grievance, if any exists, is one which it is the province of Kalutarians themselves to redress. Meanwhile the "Kalutara snail" he is and the "Kalutara snail" he will remain, for though as is now known he hails from the African coast, via Mauritius, history is as certain that he landed at Kalutara as that William the Conqueror stepped ashore

at Hastings or Hengist and Horsa at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet. He rapidly made his appearance in Colombo, where he is still rife in many parts of the suburbs, despite every imaginable means having been taken to eject him. Here he became the innocent cause of a controversy in which the late Sir Henry McCallum unwittingly embroiled himself with the Ceylonese legal fraternity. With no thought beyond sustaining the note of urbane waggishness esteemed proper on these occasions, Sir Henry, in a prize-day speech delivered in his gubernatorial capacity, sought to dissuade the youth of the colony from embracing the already overcrowded legal profession. He went in fact so far as to compare the army of Ceylonese lawyers to the big battalions of Kalutara snails. Little did he reckon that in so venturing he was arousing a nest, not of snails, but hornets. A morning paper of pronounced Nationalist tendencies found no criticism too strong for the Governor's indiscretion in likening lawyers to creeping things, while the Law Students' magazine rushed up its editorial supports, and readers were regaled with such refreshing logic as "the Governor compared lawyers to snails, and snails were creeping things" — *ergo*, the lawyers had sustained gross and gratuitous insult.

Whether or not *Achatina* has now moved on from that district wherein he made his first unwelcome appearance is, I should say, doubtful, despite a Kalutarian resident's suggestion that such really is the case. Proof that he had indeed done so ought to inspire more satisfaction than alarm. It had been feared that he had come to stay, and was systematically extending the zone of his operations, but should it prove that he is merely indulging a passion for exploration, a kind of wanderlust as it were, Ceylon can put up with his presence with something of resignation in the consciousness that the incubus will be

temporary only, and that the last days of the great *Achatina* trek will see the ultimate snail boarding the Talaimannar ferry by stealth, his stalky eye bent upon the luscious possibilities of the Indian scene.

It was no surprise to me when I learnt, five years or so after the snail plague had raged so furiously in Ceylon, that *Achatina* had effected a lodgment on the not so distant coasts of the Malay Peninsula. Installed myself by this time as a Malayan editor, it seemed to me that herein lay opportunity for a useful piece of public service. By bruiting abroad with all the journalistic arts at my command such excesses and abominations as this creature had been guilty of elsewhere while one's self had been about to make a note of it, I could surely persuade Government and the planting community generally to precautionary measures that would checkmate this pestilent invader before he got his campaign under way. But though I made out the most damning indictment conceivable in a series of leading articles, and more than one correspondent wrote to confirm my account of *Achatina's* depredations and to join with me in urging the authorities to be up and doing, officialdom stirred but slightly in its sleep, and was understood to mutter something about having got their eye on the new arrival, so that everything would be quite all right. Further protests resulted in somebody in the Agricultural Department being detailed to write a brochure deprecating the sensation sought to be aroused in a section of the Press. The allusion therein to *Lamprophorus* was noted, however, and it was claimed that as *Lamprophorus* likewise existed in Malaya, a natural economic adjustment could be relied on to keep *Achatina's* numbers at a respectably low level. The lay public were frankly scoffers, and before I ultimately left the country an irreverent member of the local bar addressed to me through the post the following quatrain:

Oh Ashley, when you part from us  
Without a sigh, without a wail  
Or any sort of farewell fuss—  
*Please take away your Giant Snail!*

I forgave his impudence. In my newspaper we had nursed various public quarrels of some intensity, but hailed each other almost nightly as boon companion in the Lake Club billiard-room.

By that time, though, things were at the stage when seven thousand coolies with seven thousand buckets working for half a year wouldn't have cleared the hosts of the invader from all the lairs and coverts into which they had penetrated. More years have passed, and every mail seems to bring me a report from some Malayan correspondent of further inroads by *Achatina* into cultivated areas of the Peninsula, truly, with its humid climate and density of vegetation, a land of far more luscious plenty than the scorched plains of Hindustan.

Well, I did what I could and got no thanks for it.

Ceylon newspapers lately contained facts or allegations of facts, gathered in the course of inquiries into the prospects of the island's tortoiseshell industry, which certainly call for investigation. As things stand, both the Government and the public appear to be tacitly conniving at a species of barbarity which may represent Draconian justice when applied to a convicted misdemeanant such as the Kalutara snail, but is sheer inhuman cruelty in the case of the turtle, a peaceful beast of huge commercial value. The use of tortoiseshell in the manufacture of articles of personal utility or adornment appears from the statistics of both local and overseas demand to be increasing, and something like a boom in the local trade is anticipated by the dealers. These are days when indications of a revival of any branch of commercial activity are more

than welcome; it behoves the Ceylon Government nevertheless to assure itself that the methods or practices upon which the results of such industry depend are legitimate and worthy on humanitarian grounds. So much cannot be said for the processes by which, on the testimony of those actually engaged in the trade, the type of shell used for the more highly priced and superior articles which are appearing on the Ceylon market in increasing numbers is regularly procured. It seems that if the shell is taken from the animal after death its colour is always found to have become dull and murky, and when thus obtained the article is in consequence of little use or profit for commercial purposes. "Hence," a Press investigator reports, and the facts are corroborated by an actual worker in the industry (though with a reluctance scarcely surprising), "the cruel expedient is resorted to of seizing the turtles as they repair to the shore to deposit their eggs, and suspending them over fires till the heat makes the plates of the dorsal shields start from the bone of the carapace, after which the creature is permitted to escape to the water."

The story is revolting enough as it stands, yet the amazing feature of the affair is the fact that instinct impels the victims of the shell-collectors' cupidity to repair year after year to the identical spot for the same filial purpose, with the result that the diabolical torture described above is year after year repeated upon the same animals. In 1826, for instance, Sir Emerson Tennent relates that a Hawkbill tortoise was taken near Hambantota with a ring attached to one of its flippers, placed there by a Dutch official some thirty years before with a view to proving the theory of these regularly recurring visits. Ceylon, it seems, has reason to congratulate itself in one particular. Legislation has been somewhat tardily enforced by which such barbaric practices are forbidden,

under penalty, to be carried on upon the actual shores of the island. Thus, while Galle still remains the centre of the industry, the bulk of the raw or what one might almost call the cooked material is now imported from Maldiva and Singapore waters, and the Ceylon animal mostly left to carry on its nursery activities without disturbance. Experts furthermore declare that Maldiva and Singapore shell is of a better quality, a consideration that no doubt largely qualifies the vexatious character of the new regulations as viewed by the trade. It can scarcely be argued, however, that the Ceylon authorities have put themselves beyond criticism by forbidding acts of cruelty to be committed within their actual zone of authority while they condone the commission of precisely the same offences at Ceylon's very doors by lending their approval to a trade which is admitted to be dependent on them. There may be nothing essentially wrong in people who are so minded being enabled to gratify a taste for the possession of manufactured tortoiseshell, which admittedly, under the hands of an expert craftsman, can be turned to purposes of singular beauty and utility. But if the gratification of that taste involves the annual roasting of a sentient creature over a slow fire, it had better be curbed. Even so with feathers. One gathers that the bird of paradise has not so far taken kindly to domestication, and that the only arguments which have hitherto induced it to make over to the lords of creation the golden treasure with which it has been dowered by Providence are those of the shot-gun and the blowpipe. The ostrich, however, has shown himself more amenable, and responds to civilising influences well-nigh as spontaneously as the barnyard fowl. Feed the brute, and you can pluck his best tail-feathers and welcome.

Having brought in the ostrich, I cannot take leave of him without a passing notice of the experiments made in

the island shortly before the war with a view to finding out whether the domesticated African species was likely to breed in Ceylon if so encouraged, thus opening another source of revenue to the colony. Once indeed these seemed in a fair way to succeed. The well-known German firm of Hagenbeck, identified through generations with the commercial side of zoology, owned in Colombo in the days when such activities were permitted to their countrymen a kind of "dump" for the reception of all manner of wild beasts from the Orient. I have seen, for instance, in the Hagenbeck bungalow compound, snarling tiger-cubs and contemplative tapirs from the Federated Malay States, sleek black panthers and morose anthropoid apes from Borneo, giant pythons, shambling bears and leopards tame as cats from the Ceylon forests, disporting themselves in more or less of amity in neighbouring cages. Somewhere about 1912 or so the brothers imported a number of African ostriches and encouraged them to start a nursery. A dozen or so of eggs were duly laid, of whose protection it was thought wiser to relieve the mother-bird and make use of an incubator to ensure the required temperature of 102 deg. F. being maintained. This proved an unfortunate move, the natural cussedness of the attendant coolie having been left out of the count. Twice were the precious eggs allowed to cool down, and though a few puny chicks did ultimately emerge it was not unnatural that the briefest of lives was here their portion. The very first chick to appear had to be assisted in the process of breaking his shell, and was obviously anything but a robust infant when he made his Ceylon début, nor did it take us by surprise when, despite careful nursing, Reginald, who had been thus named in honour of our new Colonial Secretary, afterwards Governor of Hong-Kong, succumbed all too early after a short and not very happy life of forty-eight hours, in the presence of his sponsors,

Mr. Hagenbeck's lieutenant and myself. It was a mournful little funeral party that proceeded to conduct his obsequies with every mark of grief and respect. Even then we held it unlikely that three or four of Reginald's brothers and sisters who were due to arrive in a day or two would prove any better fitted to battle with a hard world than their unfortunate little relative, who will, however, always be remembered as the very first ostrich chick to open his eyes on the blue skies and waving palms of Ceylon. We did hope though that a healthy and sturdy brood might emerge from a later clutch which had been better tended, and counted that their chances of being reared successfully were rosier for the fact that lucerne, which is the ostrich chick's substitute for Glaxo, had been reported procurable from one or two districts up country.

Those hopes were vain. No more Ceylon-bred ostriches have ever seen the light.

I see that my only snake story so far is about a *Tic polonga*, who has in truth an evil disposition even among serpents, though not more so than his cousin, *Tic karawela*. Of the cobra, common throughout the low-country and not seldom to be met with even now in suburban compounds of Colombo, though to rouse his anger is to court catastrophe, and he has even been known to chase officious and meddlesome *mem-sahibs* round their own bungalows, many legends are in circulation as to his natural magnanimity and good sense. Even the Mahavansa has a tale to the cobra's credit.

It chanced one day that the good King Buddhadasa, a pious succourer of all sick and sorrowful, founder of innumerable hospitals and asylums, miraculous healer of rheumatic or tuberculous monks and women in travail, or such as having eaten frog-spawn by accident engendered large and voracious batrachians which gnawed at their



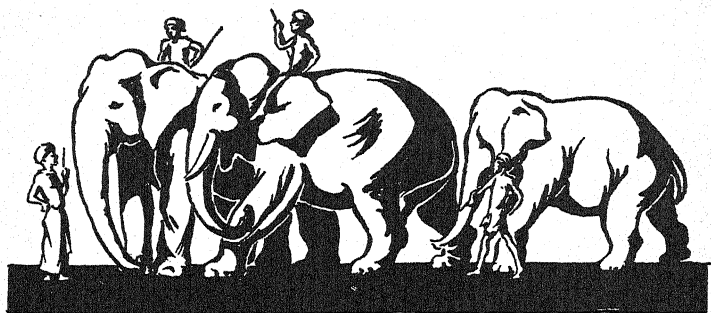
host's brains until extracted by the King's art, who likewise angled cunningly for a chance-swallowed serpent by dangling a baited line within the sufferer's gullet, the inmate rising to the first cast and being adroitly landed, this royal philanthropist and miracle-monger, I say, encountered a large king-cobra stretched supine on an ant-hill by the roadside, displaying for the sympathy of passers-by a dreadful tumour in the neighbourhood of his diaphragm. "The great and good King concluded that the cobra was suffering from some complaint. Accordingly he descended from his elephant and, approaching the distressed reptile, thus addressed him: 'I know the reason of thy coming, King-cobra. Unquestionably thou art highly gifted; but as thou art also addicted to fits of rage on sudden impulse, I cannot touch thee to treat thy complaint. So what is to be done?' Whereupon the cobra, perfectly pacified, put his head in a hole, and left only his body exposed. The King then opened the serpent's belly, extirpated the tumour, applied efficacious remedies, and closed the wound." The patient's recovery being complete and instantaneous, his deliverer was moved (not perhaps without justice) to a soliloquy of the "What a good boy am I!" order. "My administration," he reflected, "must certainly be really excellent; even the animal creation recognises that I am a most compassionating person." The story finishes creditably to all concerned, for, not to show himself ungrateful, the snake left the scene for a moment to return with a fee commensurate with his benefactor's services in the shape of a jewel of inestimable worth. Subsequently presented by the monarch to the abbots of Abhayagiriya, this gem might have been seen for many years set cunningly as an eye for the great statue of the Lord Buddha, and one must fear that the sacred college were hard put to it to discover a worthy counterpart. Scant and scrappy notice is all that I have been able

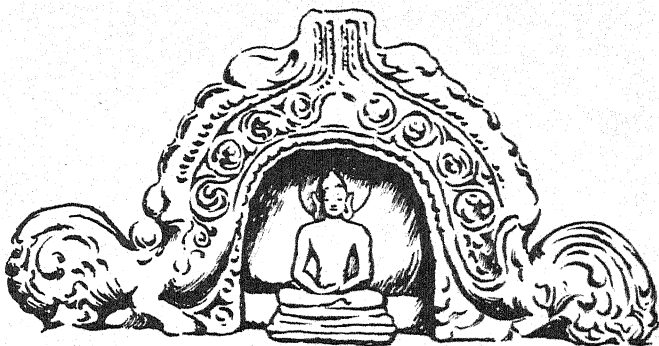
to give the python and iguana, the plebeian mud-turtle, who acquires a vicarious sanctity where he paddles in the moat of the Temple of the Tooth, but teems in the culverts of the metropolis till in times of monsoon spate he chokes the drains and causes the P.W.D. to blaspheme, whereafter he is shot forth in a clambering, struggling avalanche of what seem decomposing coco-nuts endowed with life into the outfalls of the Beira lake; nor can I dwell on the idiosyncrasies of scorpion, centipede, flying cockroach, "stink-bug" (which describes him fully), of the fire-fly and the lantern beetle, or those grotesques, the stick and leaf insects. Of all such, certain of their manners and customs must be seen to be believed. There is one beast, however, that I cannot bring myself to dismiss in less than a paragraph, and he is the cabragoya.

Figure to yourself then a kind of land crocodile or monitor, a sort of giant lizard in fact, of amphibious habit, whose food is garbage and whose drink is mud, who never shows himself to passenger or globe-trotter, but will reveal his sluggish and mud-encrusted length (which may be six to eight feet) to the persevering resident who in times of drought will seek him out among the paddy lands and marshes where linger the last trickles of the lesser waterways, a kind of aquatic concentration camp for all the finny refugees of the neighbourhood. Here you can track your cabragoya by what appears to be the trail of ridged perambulator wheels in the mud, and you will come upon him squirming and slithering in some sequestered puddle. If you covet his skin, essay to kill him stone-dead with ball or swanshot in the head. Anything less will splatter off his armoured hide like dried peas. Only the outcast coolie will strip his noisome carcass even for a bribe of two rupees, but when cured the skin of neck, chest, and belly is seen to be beautifully mottled and reticulated in black and greenish white, and

among other exotics stands, I believe, at the moment high in favour with the Bond Street shoemaker.

They say in the villages that he lives for twenty years. Among all beasts he is the lowliest of the low in caste, and who touches his corpse cannot eat rice for seven days. He is such a vulgar fellow, in fact, that there's none so low to do him reverence upon the whole roll-call of Ceylon's fauna, and he comes rightfully at the very tail of my catalogue.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE COMING OF VIJAYA

SINHALA, the Sinhalese, country and people of the Lion, still boast the lion rampant as their national emblem, though there is no evidence of the king of beasts ever having been indigenous in the island, nor, to the best of my belief, in the adjoining districts of Southern India. There is a record of one or possibly two living specimens having been introduced during Knox's sojourn, presents probably from some foreign potentate to King Raja Sinho, an inveterate collector of curiosities of every description, and it is more than likely that his predecessors imported other specimens for the royal menageries. Yet unusual as the sight of a live lion was and is to the Sinhalese, no device figures more frequently in the ancient architecture, art, and legend of the island. The reason is not far to seek, for they are veritably the Children of the Lion if the Mahavansa legend is to be taken seriously, monkish historians having traced the royal line of Lanka back through many dynasties to the offspring of an Indian princess and a species of super-lion whom she encountered

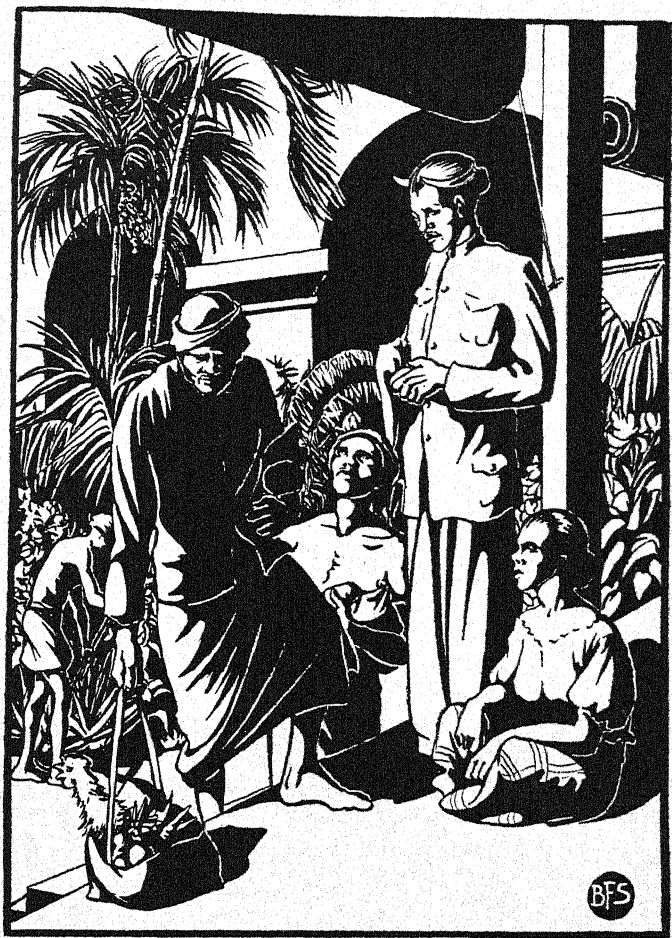
on her travels after having run away from home. As told in the old Sinhalese chronicle, the story has both novelty and charm, and is certainly less repellent in *motif* than the perhaps equally ancient legend of our own land which relates how a fair and noble lady became enamoured of a pig.

A King and Queen reigning in a far country had a little daughter, and at her birth they ordered the sooth-sayers to make divinations, for they looked for a fair and auspicious future for this lovely child. And drawing lines in the sand and making study of the stars they foretold that the child would grow up fairer than her mother, who was a most beautiful Princess and the only daughter of a King. But they prophesied that she would be wayward and troublesome, a prey to strange longings. "It is written in the sand," they said, "that thy daughter shall be bride to the King of Beasts." And the child blossomed into a maiden lovelier than any in her father's kingdom, but capricious and wilful, and so desirous of admiration that for very shame her parents could not suffer her, and became cold to this Princess who did them so little honour.

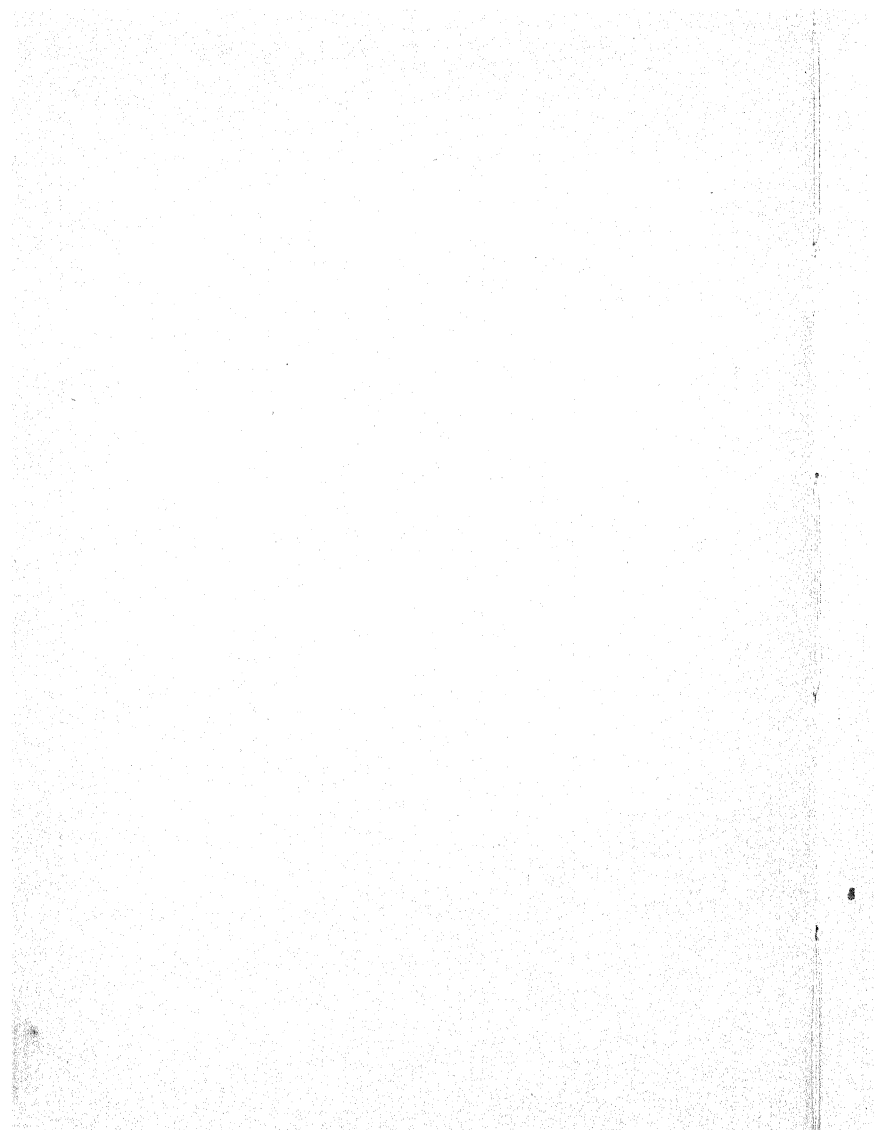
Having little pride in her kingly ancestry, the Princess fled one morning from her father's palace. Desiring the joy of an independent life she joined a wandering caravan travelling to the Magadha country, and as none recognised her or sought to check her in her wild behaviour she was for a time perfectly happy.

One day, on the borders of the Lala country, a huge lion sprang out from the forest and felled the leader of the caravan with one blow of his paw. The travellers rushed hither and thither, mad with fright, and in a minute all had hidden themselves among the bushes.

Quivering with excitement, the Princess peeped out from behind the trunk of a mango tree, where she had



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sprung when panic overtook her companions. She saw that the road was empty save for the dead man and the lion, who with one paw resting upon his prey raised his majestic head and roared like thunder.

When she marked the lion's noble mien, the massive symmetry of his limbs, and his waving tail and kingly mane, a curious tremor shook the limbs of the Princess.

At that moment the lion caught sight of her.

Quitting his prey, he advanced towards her with dignified gait. His tail waved more gently, his ears were laid back, and his roaring ceased to shake the earth. Like a giant cat, he rubbed her knees with his velvety muzzle.

Without fear, she stroked his silky mane, and beneath her touch the muscles of his shoulders twitched under his tawny skin.

And the lion picked her up in his teeth without hurting her, as his mother had taught him how to do, and padded swiftly and without noise into the jungle.

When she had dwelt a year in the lion's cave, the Princess woke up one morning to find two little babies crying at her breast.

She saw that the little boy was strong and healthy, yet that there was something odd about the shape of his hands and feet, so she called him Sihabahu. But the little girl's fingers and toes were as perfectly modelled as her own, and she called her Sihasivali.

And for sixteen years they lived in the cave. The lion brought them food and drink, and crouched beside them, purring in the fierceness of his love.

When the lion had gone hunting one morning, Sihabahu said:

"Why is it, dear mother, that you and our father are so different?"

Then the Princess was very troubled, but she told her



son all the story, even from the time when the soothsayers had made divinations, drawing lines in the sand.

"But why do we stay here?" said Sihabahu.

"Thy father has closed up the cave with a rock," the Princess told him.

Then Sihabahu sprang up, seized the rock and placed it on his shoulder, and so ran forth fifty leagues into the jungle and back in one day.

The next time his father the lion went out hunting Sihabahu picked up the Princess and Sihasivali, spurned the rock away from the mouth of the cave with his foot, and bore mother and sister both with speed to a border village, many leagues from the cave. And as they went the three fashioned themselves garments of leaves.

Now there dwelt in the village a cousin of the Princess, being ruler of that province, whom, as they came forth from the jungle, they beheld while he sat giving judgments under a banyan tree.

"Who are these?" he asked his secretaries.

"We are forest-folk," said the Princess.

"You don't look very civilised, certainly," said the ruler of the province. And he commanded the village people to give these vagrants any of their old clothes that they could spare.

When they had donned these, the Princess and her children appeared as if clad in the most gorgeous apparel.

Then the ruler of the province ordered food to be offered to them on leaves as if they had been humble folk, and immediately the leaves were turned into platters of gold.

"I thought you said you were jungle-folk?" said the ruler of the province.

"So we are," said Sihasivali, for that was all she knew about it.

"I suppose I'd better tell you," said Sihabahu. "She's only a girl and doesn't know anything, and my mother

here seems to be ashamed of the whole business." And then he told the ruler of the province the entire story, beginning with the soothsayers who had drawn lines in the sand.

"Well, I never!" said the ruler of the province. And then he looked at the Princess and saw that she was still very beautiful, and considering that she must be his cousin, he asked her to marry him. The two children were given servants to wait upon them, and plenty of pocket-money.

While all this was going on the lion, having finished his hunting, made speed back to the cave, craving for the fellowship of his loved ones. But he found the stone rolled away and the cave quite empty, and he mourned bitterly for his family, especially Sihabahu, of whom he was very proud. And wild with grief he ranged the whole country round searching for his lost ones. He came roaring through village after village, and everywhere men fled before him.

And one came in haste to the King, saying: "A lion ravages thy kingdom; shield thy people, O King, in this extremity."

The King was too busy to go himself, but he sent a crier forth on an elephant's back, proclaiming a reward of a thousand pieces of gold to anyone who would slay the lion. As none was enterprising enough, however, to accept this offer the King had to raise the reward to two thousand pieces of gold, and then to three thousand.

Though he was allowed plenty of pocket-money, Sihabahu always lost it at once in gambling with the youths who lounged in his stepfather's courtyard, and when the King's reward was proclaimed from the back of an elephant he was anxious to make trial for it, but his mother restrained him. When the reward was raised the first time she only kept him back with difficulty, and when the King made it

three thousand pieces of gold, Sihabahu spoke rudely to his mother and ran out of the house. He ran all the way to the Capitol, where he kicked open the door of the royal treasury and took the three thousand pieces at once, because he thought the King might change his mind.

Then he asked to be taken before the King, who, impressed by his strength and boldness, offered him half the kingdom if he could succeed in vanquishing the lion.

And Sihabahu went swiftly forth from the city towards the cave.

From afar the lion where he lay at the mouth of his cave saw his son coming swiftly through the jungle, and purring with love he leapt to greet him and fawn upon him. But Sihabahu's greeting was an arrow that came speeding from his bow. So great was the lion's tenderness towards his son that the arrow rebounded from his forehead and fell at the boy's feet, and so it happened a second time with a second arrow that Sihabahu sped against his father. Then the tenderness of the lion towards the boy was changed to wrath, and when Sihabahu shot a third arrow at the lion it pierced his body, and the lion writhed on the sand before the cave and died, yet his death came about more by great grief than by reason of the arrow.

Then Sihabahu smote off the head of the lion with the mane and bore it to the Capitol. There he found that the King had already lain dead seven days, and the ministers offered him the kingdom.

The sequel to this very remarkable narrative, if we are to go on believing the Mahavansa, was that when the ministers offered Sihabahu the kingdom he decided on thinking the matter over that he did not particularly want one, at least not that kingdom anyhow. He took then what must be regarded as the very proper course

of handing it over to his mother's second husband, he being a much more presentable consort than his predecessor, and taking with him his sister Sihasivali, he journeyed thence to the land of his birth, and there founded the mighty city of Sihapura, and about it he built many villages. In the fullness of time he chose a wife, and she bore him twin sons sixteen times. The eldest of the thirty-two sons was called Vijaya, but from a boy he grew up ill-mannered and turbulent, though his twin-brother, Sumitta, was mild and gentle in his bearing.

"Chastise thy son, O King," urged the people.

But as Vijaya grew to man's estate there was no holding him. He broke every law of the realm with impunity, and boasted about it afterwards.

The people groaned and murmured against his intolerable deeds of violence, and the boldest among them said to the King:

"Slay thy son, O King!"

Whereupon Sihabahu laid a plan to take and disarm his turbulent son Vijaya, and with him seven hundred ruffians who hailed the Prince as their leader, and went about armed with weapons to do his bidding. When the King had caused half their heads to be shaved he set them forth upon the sea in boats, and with many perils by the way the tide bore them to the shores of Lanka, the isle of sweet odours.

Now on that same day the Guide of the World disposed himself to pass into his Nirvana between the twin-like Sala trees.

When he who has the five eyes, the Conqueror, the incomparable, had lived eighty-four years and fulfilled all his duties in the world, then between the twin-like Sala trees, on the day of full moon in the month Vesakha, was

the light of the universe extinguished. And lying there on the bed of his Nirvana, the Guide of the World spoke unto Indra, King of the Gods, who waited with other gods beside his bed:

"To-day is come Vijaya, a valiant prince, to Lanka from the country of Lala, with seven hundred of his soldiers. Protect him, O Lord of the Gods, and that island where he has set foot."

Whereupon Indra, the Lord of Gods, deputed out of respect the guardianship of Lanka, most lovely of islands, to Vishnu, the god who is in colour like the blue lotus.

And quickly flying through the air the blue god hovered over the island, and saw where Vijaya and his men drew up their boats on the shore.

So the blue god sat down at the foot of a tree in the guise of a wandering monk, and straightway Vijaya's men came crowding about him.

"Tell us, good monk," said one, "if there be food and drink upon this island, for woefully we hunger and thirst."

"Tell us whether there be men here or devils," said another, "for we have passed narrowly through many perils."

"Tell us the name of this island," said a third, "for tempest and floods have borne us from our reckoning."

Then the blue god told them that the name of the island was Lanka, lovely and blessed. "Food," he declared, "and drink you will find in abundance, but of men there are none here, nor will any dangers arise for your undoing."

Whereupon he sprinkled water on them from his bowl, and wound a thread about the hand of each as a talisman against the power of demons. Then he vanished into the air. And in his place stood a demon in the form of a dog.

Vijaya told his men not to take any notice of the dog.

But one of them argued with himself after this fashion: "No smoke without a fire," he said, "and no dog without

a village. Save wild dogs only, who will not stand and sniff the robes of strangers. Moreover, in all villages one finds food and drink." So he ran after the dog.

Now the dog was a servant of Kuvanna, Queen of the Demons, to whose feet he led the truant, where she sat spinning, after the manner of a woman hermit, under a tree that cast its shade beside a lotus pond.

When the man saw the pond he threw himself upon the ground and drank long draughts of the cool water, and then jumped in and laved his body in its freshness. Afterwards he gathered lotus buds and shaped a great leaf into a cup, and was for bearing it away to ease his friends' thirst, and show them what an enterprising young fellow he was.

But the woman hermit stopped spinning and said:

"Stay! Thou art my prey."

And the young man stood, as the saying is, rooted to the spot.

The demon queen would have liked to eat him, as she had rather counted on being able to do. But then she had known nothing about the magic thread. She tried to coax him to give it up.

"Give me the thread, brave soldier."

But the young man was not altogether without discretion.

Kuvanna was furiously angry, and by a concentrated effort of will-power she managed to seize the young man and throw him, despite his protestations, into a conveniently adjacent chasm.

Discipline was not particularly good among Vijaya's soldiers, and in some ways they were very like sheep. So by and by it happened that the six hundred and ninety-nine others all found themselves bemoaning their fate in like wise at the bottom of the chasm.

Now Vijaya was a truly great captain, and therefore solicitous for his men's welfare. Finding himself alone

upon the shore he gathered up his sword, bow, battle-axe, spear, and shield. Nor of these weapons did he cast aside any one, for a great captain will ensure all possible precautions upon such an adventure.

Presently he reached the lotus pond, fair to look upon. He beheld also a hermit-woman, old and ugly, but of his soldiers not even the print of their feet. Wherefore, being a sagacious captain, his mind misgave him concerning the guile and knavery that lies in all women. Yet to Kuvanna, who continued to spin, he spoke fairly.

"Lady," he asked, "hast thou not seen my men?"

"What wantest thou with thy people, Prince?" she answered. "Drink thou, and bathe."

"So she knows my rank," thought Vijaya. "Proof enough that she is a demon." For he was a sagacious prince.

Dexterously he plucked his bow from among the armoury that swung about his loins and rushed upon Kuvanna, catching her with the bowstring about the neck. Then, seizing her long hair with his left hand, he lifted his sword in the right, shouting terribly the while:

"My men! Slave, give me back my men, or I put an end to thy devilry."

Kuvanna could do nothing but plead for her life, which she did very eloquently. She promised the Prince a kingdom, and even offered to marry him.

But Vijaya, who through vicissitudes of fortune had acquired foresight, bound Kuvanna by the most terrible oaths and conjurations not to betray him. Whom also, when these charges were laid upon her, he commanded only to bring thither his men with all speed.

And one after another each was jerked forth out of the chasm, till all the seven hundred stood before him.

"These soldiers must be hungry," said Vijaya.

With her distaff Kuvanna struck the ground at their

feet, revealing a cavern holding vast stores of rice and many rich cargoes of the ships belonging to mariners whom she had devoured during many years.

The soldiers needed no command from their captain to set immediately about preparing curries and other sumptuous dishes, laying the same before Vijaya.

Now this prince was a very gallant captain, and one moreover not apt to bear malice overlong, so he very politely invited Kuvanna to sit down and join him in his repast, of which with his own hands he served her the best portions. Moreover he gave the signal to his men that they also should satisfy their hunger.

Intrigued beyond measure both by the Prince's appearance and behaviour, Kuvanna bethought her of what promises she had made, and how she might effect some requital for treatment so far beyond her merits.

Being a demon and no mortal, she was able without difficulty to cast off the displeasing form and habiliments that she had assumed, and to take upon herself the lovely shape of a maiden in the flower of her youth, adorned with rare jewels and ornaments. Also she caused the demons, her subjects, to erect instantly a rich and elegant pavilion, marvellously furnished in fit manner with couches, draperies, and precious vessels. This she did while the Prince was meditating for a few moments, having eaten of the dishes and drunk cool water from the spring.

And when Vijaya raised his eyes, Kuvanna advanced in the beautiful and gracious guise of a maiden of sixteen years, and the Prince, well pleased, stood up and raised her hand, saluted her, and passed with her under the gorgeous canopy, and all the soldiers made their encampment in the surrounding forest, and the bridal feast continued far into the night.

When the great King Vijaya knew that his days were



numbered he sent messengers bearing a letter to his brother Sumitta. "For," he said, "I am old and all my sons are dead." And Sumitta's queen had borne him three lusty sons, great in war and in hunting. When he had heard the letter, Sumitta learned how his brother was troubled on his death-bed for the welfare of his own people and for his realm of Lanka, beauteous and greatly favoured. And having pondered the matter, Sumitta called to his three sons.

"I also, my dear ones," he said, "am old, even as the great King my brother, and to the lot of one of you must fall the lordship of Lanka, the island of grateful perfumes. Choose now among you."

The two elder Princes considered this counsel in their hearts, but Panduvasudeva, youngest of the three, leapt up and saluted the King.

"I will go thither," he said.

"Be it so," answered the King. And orders were given for thirty-two sons of ministers to accompany the Prince on his journey, in the guise of wandering monks. And with a fair wind they came to Lanka, where holy men from the capital received them with great respect, for of this coming of Panduvasudeva the soothsayers had foretold. But because the Prince had chosen as yet no consort they delayed the full ceremony, though yielding him all prerogatives of kingship.

Now in those days it fell out that on the farther side of Ganges a King founded a city and begat seven sons and one daughter, fair of form and eagerly wooed. So radiant and exquisite a maiden was she that you would have thought her a woman made of gold, and for love of her the Kings of seven countries sent gifts to her father's court. But being neither of firm will nor strong mind, and now, moreover, having no wife to manage the affair for him, the King hustled his daughter on shipboard with thirty-

two girl friends to amuse her, and launched the ship on the Ganges.

"Now," he said, "whosoever can, let him take my daughter."

Then he went back to his apartments and finished the poem that he had been writing when the gifts arrived from the seven Kings. He told his sons that he had consulted the soothsayers, who had assured him that a sea voyage would be just the thing for their sister.

Meanwhile a favouring wind carried the Princess and her companions straight to the shores of Lanka, the odorous isle. There were no men on board, so they packed up all their best clothes, and they stepped ashore robed like nuns.

Fortunately they met a soothsayer almost at once.

"How many are there of you?" he asked the Princess.

"Thirty-three altogether," she said.

"That's right," said the soothsayer. "This way, please." And he conducted the party by a quick and easy route to the capital, where Panduvasudeva and his thirty-two friends were still making highbrow conversation with the holy men, and beginning to get a little bored.

However, the arrival of the Princess and her retinue put everything right. They all got married the same afternoon, and lived happily for a long time afterwards.

So charming in their *naïveté* and freshness, so remarkable for their artistic and literary merit, are any number of the tales which abound in the Sinhalese chronicles with some pretensions to authenticity, first and foremost of which stands the Mahavansa, that one wonders why many of the noisiest claimants to Sinhalese autonomy appear not to have been at the pains to familiarise themselves with the best of these national classics, preferring rather to

support their demands to be allowed to go their own way without European interference on the thoroughly bad evidence of apocryphal and fantastic legends of which many are of the most recent growth. An ingenious perversion of a passage in Knox, for instance, remains in general currency to this day, and though its falsity is exposed in print about once a week, will apparently never be scotched. No one wants to minimise the vanished glories of the Lion race, which were quite remarkable enough not to need exaggeration, and it is surely allowable to dissent from the view that such vanishing synchronised with or was brought about by the advent of the Western invader. One hopes, in fact, that if the Government, as now newly constituted with an added weight of Ceylonese opinion in both Legislature and Executive, will encourage the State schools to make the teaching of Sinhalese history even in an elementary form a compulsory adjunct to the curriculum of knowledge imparted to the young idea of all indigenous communities, future generations may be led to avoid a multitude of pitfalls into which the present craze for reform, accompanied as it is by an almost universal and devouring eagerness to augment the volume of verbiage which "reformers" of every degree are spouting alike from Press and platform, has led quite a number of more or less eminent people, the distinction of whose public services hitherto has justified detached observers in expecting their utterances to be marked at least by some general form of respect for the truth. But when Ceylonese leaders of admittedly distinguished calibre who are as a rule careful in these matters add the weight of their testimony to the perpetration of a series of glaring inaccuracies that might well have been imagined so palpable as not to call for exposure, something more than a nebulous doubt is raised in one's mind as to the degree of all-round improvement attained by Ceylon since the presumably golden age of a

hundred years ago, when Sir Alexander Johnstone made his very flattering observations. Whenever, for instance, a public meeting is held in the island at which the present fitness of the Sinhalese people to be self-governing comes up for discussion, the most extraordinary claims are made, a favourite one being that the population of the place under the golden pre-European regime was in the neighbourhood of fifty millions. Such a fact, if it were a fact, implies a population with a density of two thousand to the square mile in the then inhabited parts of Ceylon.

There now arises the question as to what these teeming millions lived upon, but the fertile fancy of the new school of historico-politicians skilfully eludes all rocks such as this, that may happen to be strewn in the course of the bark of their fancy. It seems the phantom millions lived, as their descendants do or did until yesterday, on rice, and they actually grew so much of it that they were able to export it in large quantities to foreign parts. Yet in no known ancient or medieval work of Sinhalese poetry, history, or religion is there any record whatever of the export of rice to foreign countries. That the island once grew enough for its own population may be true, and conversely it may not; that the negligible population of the Maldivé Islands not only possibly but probably looked to Ceylon for the small supplies required of a cereal to whose production their own sterile soil was unsuited, is not only possible but quite probable. One can hardly call such a traffic, however, "the export of large quantities" of Ceylon's "surplus" to foreign countries.

Take again the reiterated eulogies of the Indian "panchayats" and the implied argument that their virtues were transcended by the village councils of Ceylon. There is nothing about the panchayats to call for remark, unless it be their singular failure to prove themselves of the slightest real benefit to the Indian masses. Their

proceedings could only have been chronicles of small beer, and while they may perhaps have enabled communal works to be executed with dispatch they existed contemporaneously with the blackest tyranny. Time cannot stale, however, nor custom wither, the reforming experts' zest for a particularly fallacious comparison, and again and again there is dinned into the public's ears the whole wearisome sequence of electors and elected from villages, via districts, to the fountain head of Government, a veritable pyramid of Village, District, and Supreme Councils culminating in, of all things, an *elected* head. This ingenious piece of historical misrepresentation is in direct contradiction to every narrative of royal succession in the Mahavansa and all other authentic or legendary chronicles of Ceylon. The tag about washing off a Sinhalese ploughman's dirt and finding him fit to be a king was *not* uttered by Knox in approval of the Sinhalese, but was quoted by him, not with approval, as a boast made by the people of two counties only, Udunuwara and Yatanuwara, "where there are such eminent persons of the *Hondrew* rank." Yet so it goes on, one orator catches up the lightly uttered inaccuracies of a predecessor, there is an efflorescence of the lie in print, and the mischievous falsehood becomes not only ineradicably engraved upon the twilit *penetralia mentis* of every half-educated fanatic in the island, but is constantly perpetuated by the educated minority from whom one might at least have looked for the verification of attempted historical arguments.

Peculiar as was the dramatic fitness of Knox's ploughman to point a moral and adorn a tale, one fears that this amiable yokel, counted out of the ring as he is for the nonce, will only too shortly rise again in all the pristine vigour of his appeal to masses and classes alike, for Lord Milner, Mr. Winston Churchill, Lord Curzon, the Duke

of Devonshire and Mr. Amery, in their day, and now probably Mr. Henderson, have presumably been left to admire his impressiveness in blissful ignorance of his real nature.

One reformer, the intriguing fact about whom being that he was not a Sinhalese but a Tamil (whose forbears in ancient Sinhalese history played a part analogous to that of Attila's Huns), perpetrated an amusing wriggle when pressed by his critics to produce *litera scripta* in proof of his claim that the population of Ceylon once amounted to forty millions. The critics were informed that they ought to have known that he had in his mind a Ceylon whose western shores stretched *as far as Madagascar*. This was a concession on lines of truly Oriental generosity, and not to be outdone the critics expressed their willingness cheerfully to admit a hypothetical population of even four hundred millions for the new Atlantis, leaving the arguments bearing upon the fitness for reform of Ceylon, as it is known in the twentieth century, precisely where they were before the phantom forty millions were conjured into being by the rhetorical arts of the speaker referred to. For these, it seems, are simply matters of oratory and rhetoric, after all. To quote the Sinhalese Press in support of the forty-million theory: "Mr. Blank has heard the *statement*, perhaps he has read it in some historical record; at any rate, he knew that his audience was familiar with it. And he used the *fact* rhetorically." The italics, as the saying goes, are mine. For purposes of oratory and rhetoric, of course, a statement is as good as a fact. That is precisely what was complained of. There are still further absurdities in the special pleading of Mr. Blank's disciples of a character that it seems almost idle to quarrel with. The contention of his critics that the mountainous portions of the island were never opened up by the ancient dwellers of Lanka is characterised as "plainly false."

Why? The Veddahs appear to supply the answer. Is it really suggested that these supremely unsophisticated jungle-dwellers or their palæolithic progenitors could ever have been induced to "open up" the leafy fastnesses whose very remoteness and inaccessibility was their main safeguard from the depredations of more advanced and aggressive races? And what sort of a "city" was it that throve on the top of Sigiriya, this "seat of Empire where pride and pleasure and pomp had their dwelling"? No more, indeed, than the last stronghold of an outlaw and a parricide, erected deliberately upon the site most difficult of access from the centres of a civilisation outraged by its criminal founder, whose "empire" was lucky to last a bare fifteen years or so.

It would be unfair to suppress the fact that certain *obiter dicta* of the late Sir Emerson Tennent when superficially considered appeared to give support to their claim, and were put forward to this intent by the advocates of the forty-million myth. What exactly did Sir Emerson say? Briefly, that while in no single instance do the Ceylon chronicles mention the precise population of the island, "it must at one time have been both dense and prodigious." Warming to his subject, the eminent author of *Ceylon* in two volumes (not a professed history) later takes a bold leap from the general to the particular, and says that it must have been at least ten times as great as it was in 1859. No authorities, no exact train of reasoning, it must be noted, but pure surmise, working up through an exhilarating sequence of Gibbonesque periods to a bold chancing, shall one put it, of the historical arm. Sir Emerson says: "It must have been," and there we are. It is magnificent, but it is not logic. The fact really is that Tennent, distinguished ornament of his age as he was, did not possess the historical mind, no uncommon deficiency in authors as we are so often

reminded. He was too truly a child of his day. The Victorian epoch was, alack, and not to put too fine a point upon it, a period *par excellence* of loose thinking and fine writing. It was fashionable in those days of our grandfathers to find one's self impelled to grandiose if vague speculations about one's fellow-men, or one's ancestors, or posterity, when at gaze upon the panorama of nature or the visible evidences of the work of men's hands, ancient or modern. Rhapsodies among ruins were then particularly the vogue. Nineveh and Baalbec acted regularly like sparks on tinder, and tourist notebooks of the fifties positively bristled with the word "Ichabod." But the science of archæology as we understand it was developed later.

Another European witness quoted was a Mr. Vincent, apparently an Indian Forest Officer, who visited the island in the eighties and made a report on Ceylon's forest administration in which he incorporated the theory that the greater part of Ceylon's "virgin" forest was not virgin at all, because the same sort of jungle that now conceals the ruins, say, of Anuradhapura, exists in a number of other places where the seeker after buried cities will draw nothing but blanks. This seems an engaging and ingenious theory, but somehow fails to carry conviction. Supplementary contentions were that in certain aspects of civilisation the ancient Sinhalese were ahead of all European competitors. Might he be kindly informed, asked Mr. Blank, whether any European nation had yet discovered a method of producing mural paintings that will retain their pristine intensity of colourings for two thousand years? Certainly he could. It was no trouble. The mural decorations of Pompeii and Herculaneum would be found not to lose by comparison with the masterpieces of Dambooll, whose antiquity, according to expert archæological opinion, is very much



less than that claimed, in fact two hundred years would be nearer the mark than two thousand. His critics were further entreated to deny at their peril the fact that the Sinhalese prepared and polished steel some centuries ago in a manner which was discovered in Europe only last century. There is without doubt evidence to show that the Sinhalese had a very pretty knack in burnishing the outside of gun-barrels. Conversely, it has been always understood that the outstanding advance in the manufacture of European fire-arms during the last century was concerned with the insides of such barrels, and that the resulting improvement in the range and accuracy of the order of weapons under review was sufficient to call for remark.

Other contributors to an animated debate in the Ceylon Press which arose out of the forty-million claim concentrated on attempted proof of the rice export theory. In support one (Tamil) correspondent quoted an unnamed "Tamil classic of eighteen hundred years ago." It was pointed out to him that no Tamil work of such an age is authenticated. He referred to a Chola monarch's capital at the mouth of the River Cauvery. No doubt the traditional Kavenpattanam was intended. This city no longer exists, and all accounts of it are merely legendary. No Chola ruler ever *saw* the Himalayas, much less conquered so far as their borders, whither this correspondent asserted that Karikal led his victorious armies, and is "said" to have planted his tiger standard. Of this monarch another poet, name adduced for once, says, but makes no attempt to prove, that in the markets of the royal capital there was exhibited among other rarities "food from Ilam (Ceylon)." The actual Tamil word used, which presumably meant "food" and not produce, was omitted to be particularised by this writer; yet rice on his own showing was so prevalent in Tanjore as not to

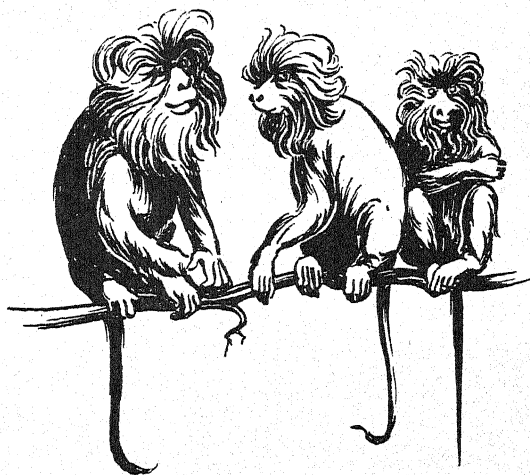
have been required to be imported. That coco-nuts may have been exported is quite probable; but it must be repeated that Sinhalese chronicles are entirely silent regarding the export either of this commodity or of rice. India certainly took elephants from Ceylon in these and later days, scarcely for food, however. Parenthetically it might be observed that the natives of Ireland were accustomed until late years to live on potatoes and export Irish bacon to the mainland of England, where it enjoyed an exceeding popularity. War-time restrictions on shipping interfered with the traffic, with the result that the Irish acquired the habit of eating their own bacon, which is now practically unobtainable east of St. George's Channel.

But this is a digression. The real point is that writers of letters and makers of speeches cannot hope to succeed in proving their theories by phrases clipped here and there from the Ramayana or similarly nebulous romances. Who, for instance, would seriously put forward the Excalibur episode from our own English *Morte d'Arthur* in proof of the contention that rustless steel was invented by the ancient Britons? Why do the adherents of the rice export theory not explore the more or less authentic chronicles in support of their case? Of these there are at least six, i.e., the Mahavansa, the Narendracharitavaloka Pradipikawa, the Nikaya Sangrahawa, the Pujawaliya, the Rayawaliya, and the Rajaratnakarana. None of these however will, one fears, lend much weight to their arguments. Another participant in the debate raised the interesting but purely academic point that the inhabitants of such districts as Bintenne, Wellessa, and the Wanni prefer kurakkan and Indian corn to rice, which they admittedly grow in addition to these crops, and are naturally only too willing to sell. Doubtless there were corresponding instances in ancient times of localities that

produced more rice than could readily be consumed on the spot, but this goes no way towards proving that it was exported from the island.

To leave the rice question and return for a moment to the other contention about population, and admitting the contingency that at some period in the remote past a continent, or a chain of islands, stretched from the present western shores of Ceylon to, say, Madagascar, that continent or those islands were not Ceylon, and such territories were certainly not inhabited by Sinhalese, who are a mixture of Gujarati people with the original Yakkhus, plus a large intermixture of South Indian Dravidian, with a fusion of probably at least two other Aryan tribes whom the invaders of the fifth century B.C. looked down upon as inferior to themselves in culture. Of these the surviving remnants are to be found in the Veddahs, and those who would seek to identify such a primitive type with empire-building or the founding of cities would be well advised to acquire a little elementary information from some such work as that of Lubbock on Prehistoric Times. The earliest real indication of the size of Ceylon in historical times is to be found in Ptolemy, who gives, in the second century B.C., dimensions for the island almost identical with those now bearing the imprimatur of the Surveyor-General's Department. As to the ten, twenty, forty millions or whatever the number of the population sustained by the island in the Golden Age, one may assume either that it did or that it did not exist at the time Ceylon was colonised by the race described in the Mahavansa as Sinhalese. In the former case, it must have been quickly wiped out, for innumerable references occur to the fact that vast stretches of the country were undeveloped in the succeeding few centuries. This is clear from the great importance attached to the erection of *new* irrigation works in those days, evidenced by numerous references to the building

of tanks and channels in the pages of the Mahavansa. If the historically uneducated mind is to assert that the country was densely populated *before* the days of irrigation one must retire from the argument, and note merely in passing that before irrigation the country was capable of supporting perhaps five to the square mile. What initiated



WANDEROOS

the whole discussion on these matters was a plea for the teaching of elementary Sinhalese history in Ceylon schools, and everything said subsequently by those anxious to disprove the arguments in favour strengthens the conviction that the new generation ought to receive some such instruction on systematic lines. Failing this, the young Ceylonese idea is left a prey to sheer bounce and "rhetoric." It seems too late to knock sense into the heads of most of the present generation of fable-mongers, whose imperviousness to the appeals of ordinary common sense

leaves them not only hugging to their bosoms but advertising from the house-tops myths suggestive of that delightful fancy about the moon being made of green cheese, and adducing in support evidence thereof just about as trustworthy as Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes.



## CHAPTER V

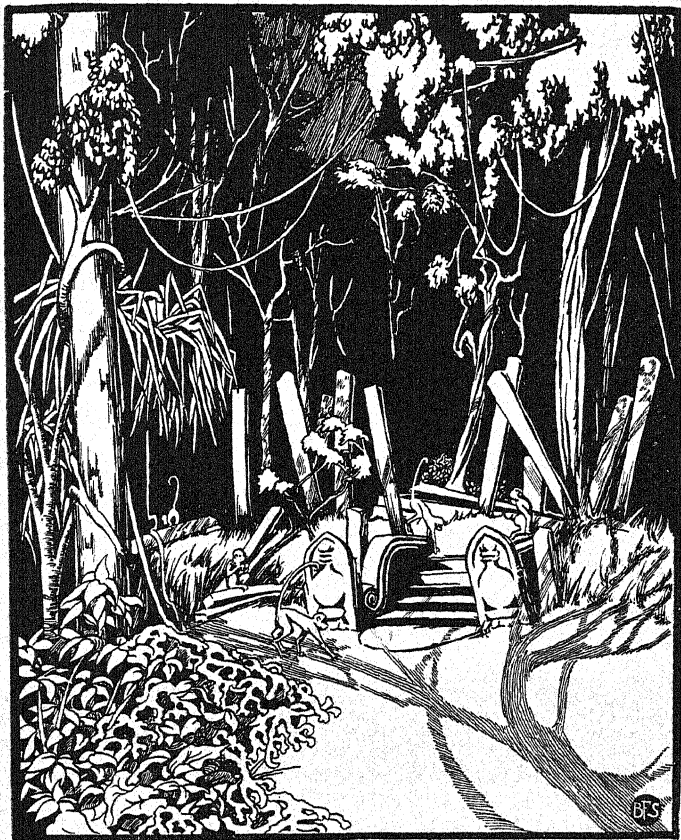
### THE STONES IN THE JUNGLE

I COULD no more draw you a map of the buried cities of Ceylon than I could fly, yet to Anuradhapura have I made my pilgrimage, by fortune meeting at the journey's end with an incomparable cicerone, who knows more of the lost cities than any other living man ever will know, for has he not pored and potted among these stones since ever he came down from Cambridge, fired with the red-hot zeal of the born archæologist? A tithe, perhaps, of the harvest of this very labour of love has been garnered and docketed—dry bones of facts only—in the official chronicles. The rest I take it dies with him, for he is an old man now, and a blight seems to rest on the labours of those who have picked up the spade where he dropped it. But what he told me as I sat open-eared in the veranda of his jungle bungalow, as he piloted me from stone to stone in the nearby forest, from tumbled monkish vihara to massy palace of dead kings and queens, from rock-hewn

bath to bosky tumulus beneath whose verdure one traced the broken outlines of a thupa of brick and stone the size of Primrose Hill, was so much magic. I regret to say that I cannot tell you where to look for anything, either here, in the forest-grown streets of that great city that was the metropolis of Lanka in its prime, or at Polonnaruwa, capital of its still splendid decadence. But the old man's talk, as I have said, was just magic in one's ears, and what he showed me of these dead bones mouldering beneath their green shroud of forest was a wonder that thrills me whenever memory lingers on it, and will still thrill me when I am as old a man (if ever) as that kind and learned scholar who strove out of the kindness of his heart to lighten the outer fringes of my ignorance.

What can there be the other side of Palk Strait, what among the stones of old Delhi of the Moguls, or the tawdry litter of the south, what even among the sand-blown cones of Gizeh, the dull cubes, lozenges, and basaltic totem-poles of Memphis, Thebes, or Karnak, to touch the holy ruins of Anuradhapura, jungle-swathed skeleton of the holy city of the north, say rather twenty cities superimposed through the centuries over an area of two hundred square miles? Here, built by men's hands, stand gigantic bell-shaped "dagobas" as big as the dome of St. Paul's, forest trees and verdure rooted in the joints of their masonry deceiving all but the eye of the archæologist into deeming them no more than giant malformations of the living rock.

Carved and fluted pillars and cornices, huge semicircular "moonstones" that are so dominant a feature of ancient Sinhalese architecture, graven with birds and beasts, bathing-pools carved from the rock in the semblance of an opening lotus bud, palaces of kings and monasteries of Buddhist monks, all scattered and fallen awry, lie prone and huddled beneath league upon league of malarial jungle.



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Not that I would argue, mark you, that the work of these long-dead architects, sculptors, and town-planners transcended that of their Egyptian or Babylonian fore-runners or contemporaries. Save in the rarest instances their art never flowered and burgeoned, never ripened even far above the primitive. Its very primitiveness lacks the "guts," to use a full-blown but expressive vulgarity, even of the savage Ethiop or Polynesian craftsman. It is rather the quantity than the quality of these ruins that is stupendous. Perhaps it were unfair to call the skeleton glories of Egypt and Babylon "dull." But I protest that the guide-books have made them so. What is the matter here is that some mysterious conspiracy of travellers and antiquarians has so far contrived to smother the claims of Ceylon's buried cities to that world-fame which they deserve. Partly this is due, perhaps, to the fact that the western world never heard of them in their prime, and even the children of those who built them forgot them in their decay. It is not a hundred years since they were rediscovered, barely fifty since systematic excavation and examination began. Only in the last generation have there been books about them. "The" book has not yet arrived. A well-meaning amateur or so has done his best, and left his camera to carry on when his pen failed him. Globe-trotters, male and female, have scurried through the place with a commission from an enterprising publisher, tapped out their MSS. in all conscientiousness and care, and delivered the goods in a neat quarto package of typescript. But these excellent people were here for how long? A week? A month? Make it six months, and I'll be bound you will have overshot the mark. And they have gone home and written books, books all about the buried cities, and nothing else. There's courage, if you like, of the sort that compels my admiration.

What Ceylon calls Anuradhapura to-day is a mere hamlet without either interest or importance, no more than a congeries of Government bungalows and offices dumped down in contiguity for purposes of official convenience. The real Anuradhapura has died and been buried a score of times, though in the interests of human knowledge the order for exhumation has gone forth, and by slow stages is proceeding. Within a bow-shot of the town, such as it is, you may still gaze upon some of the wonders of the world. There is, perhaps, the oldest known tree on the globe. Individual tree, I mean; some say that the cedars of Lebanon, even the redwoods of California and certain of the African giants are older still, yet these have neither names nor history.

But here is the Bo-tree, the sap still running feebly in its few gnarled limbs, propped up every one now with stout baulks of supporting timber; its trunk no longer visible, walled up to many feet from ground-level with four superimposed terraces of masonry encasing far-garnered deposits of the richest and most sacred soil; the innermost path that rings its trunk at some three-quarters of its natural height glazed with green tiles whereon monks robed in saffron yellow or cinnamon pace in meditation, warders ever on the look out to guard the sacred wood, the fallen leaves even, from the touch of a defiling hand. If they could they would banish those frisking monkeys from this holy shade, but the thing has been tried, and found impossible. The monkey's penchant for the Bo-tree as a playground and gymnasium is incurable.

Tennent is eloquent on its venerable attributes:

Compared with it, the oak of Elderslie is but a sapling (seven hundred years old when blown down in 1859, a few years after Tennent wrote), and the Conqueror's Oak in Windsor Forest numbers barely half its years. The yew-trees of Fountains Abbey are believed to have flourished there 1200 years ago;

the olives in the Garden of Gethsemane were full-grown when the Saracens were expelled from Jerusalem, and the cyprus of Soma, in Lombardy, is said to have been a tree at the time of Julius Cæsar; yet the Bo-tree is older than the oldest of these by a century, and would almost seem to verify the prophecy pronounced when it was planted, "that it would flourish and be green for ever."

Tennent, I observe, though he drags in the eucalypts of Tasmania and the dragon-tree of Orotava, says nothing of the half-dozen or more oaks in Western Europe that are credited with a life of two thousand years, or of the great chestnut of Tortworth, reputed to be 540 years old at the time of King John's accession, which would give us a real live link with Roman times in Britain. There is something of surmise in these computations. As to the age of the Bo-tree there is none.

Here, too, stands the "Brazen Palace" of King Gamani, once eleven stories high. Covered it was in the old days with plates of glittering copper, so the Mahavansa tells us, and no wonder men came to know it as the Brazen Palace. The story of its building reads like a Dunsany romance, though the tale is no fable. There is no reason whatever to believe that Mahanama's tale of the treasures poured by Gamani's pious hand into those of the architects and artificers who built this palace of a dream is in the least exaggerated. Holy men who had sojourned for a space with the thirty-three gods of the Buddhist heaven brought back with them the rough plan of a mansion in the skies which for the nobility and grandeur of its proportions had fired their priestly fancy. To infect Gamani with their own enthusiasm was the easiest task, and he was not one to carry through these matters by halves. Nor did he set out to attempt the impossible. The humble serving-wench who was reborn to find herself the mistress of a gem-palace 150 miles high and some 600 miles round

would probably have sniffed at Gamani's doll's house. But listen to the tale of its building.

In the time of the sage Kasapi it was when the holy Brahman Asoka, who of his piety had set apart a perpetual provision of food for the brotherhood, called to him his serving-woman, Birani. "Your task be it," he said, "to see these bhikkus never go hungry." And faithfully all her life long she carried out this pious duty, and passing from the world, was born again a maiden in the flower of her youth. In a gleaming palace that floated in the clouds a thousand nymphs ministered to her. Twelve yojanas high was the palace, and forty-eight yojanas the circuit of its walls. Adorned it was with a thousand jutting window-chambers; within, the thousand rooms of its nine stories gleamed with light, each chamber shell-garlanded and latticed with a network of tiny bells; in the midst of it a fair tower gay with fluttering pennons. And when the holy men, as they passed through the plains of heaven, had sight of that palace, they traced a drawing of it in red arsenic upon a cloth of linen, and bearing it earthwards with them displayed it before the holy brotherhood, who sent it even unto the King. Filled with joy, Gamani walked in his splendid park, and vowed to build here a palace in the likeness of the drawing.

And before one stone was laid upon another, he, the generous King, ordered his treasurers at each of the four gates to place piles of gold, at each gate eight hundred thousand pieces. At every gate, moreover, he bade them lay garments in a thousand bundles, and many pitchers filled with oil, honey, sugar in lumps, and sugar like fine sand, causing a proclamation to be made: "No work shall here be done without reward," and ordering his assessors to reckon the work of the people, and that their wages be given to them.

Four-square stood the palace, each side a hundred

cubits long, and the like in height. The nine stories of this fair palace rose one upon another, and in each story a hundred window-chambers like eyes, every one overlaid with silver and terraced with coral, and in the coral precious gems glittered like stars. Bright with gems were the lotus-flowers carved delicately in coral by the King's artificers, and on the trellised balustrade tinkled a multitude of silver bells.

In the midst of all rose the gem-pavilion of the harem, fashioned like the chariot of a god. Solid precious stones made its pillars, and graven thereon lions, tigers, and shapes of guardian spirits, while about the whole ran a network of pearls and a balustrade of coral. Within, all sparkling with the seven gems, stood a shining throne of ivory, its seat of mountain crystal, while upon its back was fashioned a sun in gold, a moon in silver, and the stars in pearls. Blossoms of the lotus and pictures of the Buddha's former life were set cunningly therein with precious stones, festooned with golden arabesques.

On the magnificent cushions of that throne rested a shining fan of ivory, and a white parasol upon a staff of silver rose above all from a base of coral and mountain crystal. Thereupon, in a design wrought of the seven gems, were traced the eight auspicious figures, the lion, the bull, the elephant, the water-pitcher, the fan, the standard, the conch-shell, and the lamp, and between these many rows of beasts fashioned in jewels and pearls, and round the edge of the parasol dangled little silver bells. Nor could the cost of this furniture of the palace be assessed even by the King's treasurers. Beds, chairs, carpets, and coverlets seemly to every rank of the brotherhood did the King command to be spread about the precincts, and even the bowl for washing the feet of the brotherhood and its ladle were of solid gold, so of what need to describe the more lordly utensils in this palace? Set in a fair garden

upon which its four gateways looked, the palace shone in splendour, recalling to the minds of the holy men the magnificence of that hall in the heaven of the thirty-three gods.

Gone is that glitter and magnificence. All that is left now is a forest of sixteen hundred columns of stone, the props or staging merely which bore the bulk of this regal fabric.

Scattered about the plain are the quaint rain-trees of the Northern Province, whose leaves fold up at night full charged with dew, opening to drench the unwary traveller who happens to be early about and, unwarned, finds himself in a shower-bath with his clothes on.

Remains still exist of an artistic excellence ranking high above the average architectural level of Old Lanka, the highly spirited elephant sculptures, for instance, of the bathing-chamber by the Tissa lake, the work of an artist for traces of whose hand one looks elsewhere in vain. They are in the form of bas-reliefs on either side of what was no doubt the dressing-chamber of the monks, whose bathing-pool this was. You see a group of them (elephants, be it understood, not *bhikkus*), instinct with life, bathing and disporting themselves among the lotuses. The companion relief shows the great beasts disturbed by some sudden alarm, quivering trunks aloft (you can almost hear them trumpeting their annoyance). In ignorance of the exact danger they take discretion to be the better part of valour, and are up and away in full retreat.

Polonnaruwa, too, has its architectural gem in miniature, a bathing-pool in the form of an eight-petalled lotus narrowing in concentric terraces to a central cavity hardly bigger than a hip-bath, for the outermost ring of its petals is no more than twenty-five feet across. An exquisite

thing, and excavated in an almost perfect state, its finding was the purest chance, a worker in the archæological survey by accident striking with his foot one of the stones of its rim hidden in undergrowth, noticeable for its unusual curved shape, inspiring further search that was rewarded in full measure.

Stupendous is the only adequate epithet for what is left, and that is little enough, of Sigiri, the city on the rock where the parricide Kasyapa founded his short-lived empire even while he trembled "in terror of the world to come, and of Mogallana," as that magnificent sentence of the Mahavansa phrases it. For while he awaited the foredoomed vengeance of the rightful heir, Kasyapa drove his minions with feverish haste and with the reckless extravagance of madness to the fortification of the Lion Rock, to hew, carve, and wall up winding galleries about its beetling sides that stand to this day as a wonder of civil engineering, and on its wind-blown summit to erect palaces and temples the like of whose close-huddled luxury and splendour was never seen, went out of his way even to order the adornment, as one may assume, of acres of the living rock with the richest and most surprising frescoes, marvellous remains of which still stretch undimmed on such roofs of caverns in the rock face as have protected them from the ravages of time and the climate.

There are vihares without end, vihares great and small, here, at Polonnaruwa, and elsewhere at a thousand hallowed spots. Monasteries these or convents, habitations for gods and monks, the details of their interior economy now laid bare in realistic detail as startling sometimes as the homely surprises of Pompeii and Herculaneum. There are thupas, "dagobas" in common parlance, thupas that confront you wherever your eye wanders, of sizes that range from midgets a yard high to young mountains on whose crumbling slopes forest trees have grown to full



maturity, died, and been renewed. Many of the holiest of these monstrous structures are in process of restoration, due, no doubt, to a kindly and entirely admirable interest on the part of the Government. But how rarely does the work of restoration seem aught but a botching and a bungling that had been better never attempted. Hard it is to fight against the ruthless hand of Time. Material such as is available moreover is not of the best and most enduring, the Sinhalese is a tinkering craftsman at this sort of work, and funds are low though the spirit that prompts these pious works is unflagging. Often, too, so shoddy is the workmanship and the material alike, the torrential rainfalls of these parts will undo in a night the work of months. Nor was even the old mason and designer an artist except by accident, while such efforts as the holy brotherhood make in these times to glorify the shrines of their faith are from the purely æsthetic view lamentable.

The lines of the ubiquitous dagoba are simple, but only graceful and attractive to the eye when the proportions of the structure are exactly right. The thupa (I use the Pali word, the Sanskrit is *stupa*, tope) almost invariably enshrines a relic, though occasionally it represents a memorial merely. Hemispherical or bell-shaped as to its major portion, presumably at the fancy of the designer, the dome rests upon a base of three concentric stories which form, in the larger types, ambulatories about the tope. Above is a cubical erection, the so-called *tee*, from which springs the spire as finial. The relic-chamber is usually at the heart of the bell, below the tee, as a rule impossible of access except by demolition of the whole monument.

Easy, then, to perceive that the dagoba may be an eyesore or a thing of beauty, all depends upon the proportion of its parts, the curve of the dome, the elegance

or otherwise of the spire. But sheer artistry, or more likely chance, sometimes produces a masterpiece the which, made dazzling with *chunam* by the hands of the faithful, is a joy and delight to the beholder who comes upon it suddenly when least expected in some grove maybe of tropic greenery.

The whole countryside here is alive with legend. Look for these old tales in the Mahavansa, and you will find how steadily, as research progresses, the good monk Mahanama is proved to be no romancer, but a historian as weighty in his judgment as Thucydides, more accurate far than Herodotus. Certainly, as that of an impartial biographer whose own orthodoxy is above suspicion, his Chronicle compares more than favourably with the Old Testament record of the Kings of Israel.

It would amuse me to tell you a story or two of the Kings by whose command the stones around you were raised upon these sites whereby you see them prone and scattered to-day.

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Panduvāsudeva and his Queen (the circumstances of whose courtship I hope you will not have forgotten) had ten sons. They called the eldest Abhaya, but nobody remembers the names of the others. Lastly, they had a little daughter, so beautiful that she was almost lovelier than her mother. Her name was Citta, and when they saw her the holy men skilled in divination foretold that she would bring much trouble on her family. "For the sake of sovereignty," they said, "will her son slay his uncles." Most of her brothers were very indignant when they heard this. They even had thoughts of killing their little sister, but Abhaya persuaded them not to do anything so cruel. They decided, however, that in view of what the diviners had said it would be advisable to keep a very close watch

on their sister, so Citta was lodged in a chamber that could only be reached through a hollow pillar in the King's private apartments. An old nurse slept in the Princess's chamber and looked after all her wants, and round the foot of the pillar and beneath Citta's window a hundred soldiers were always on guard. But from the very rumour of her loveliness all the young men among the King's subjects fell in love with the Princess. People no longer talked of Princess Citta, but of Umadacitta, "the Princess who drives men mad with her beauty."

One morning when Umadacitta was fifteen years old she looked out of her window. Below she saw, gazing straight up at her, a pretty boy. He bore himself gracefully like a Prince, and with eyes full of ardent longing he cast upon her a burning glance, but said nothing. "Who is that pretty boy?" she asked her old nurse. And the nurse looked out of the window as well.

"That is Gamani," she said, "a son of thy uncle, and one of the King's pages."

Now Gamani's gentle ways and love-lorn mien, for he had fallen in love with Umadacitta before he ever saw her, and for that reason had begged to be taken into the King's service, had already won the heart of the old nurse. She gave the soldiers a potion in their drink so that they slept, and that night she dropped down a hook-ladder from the window of Umadacitta's chamber, and up the ladder climbed Gamani, his heart on fire with love. He found that one burning glance into the Princess's eyes had told her all he wanted her to know. And the next night the ladder was there again, and many nights thereafter.

Now all this was, of course, very wrong, but no one except the old nurse knew anything about it for months and months. And then one morning there was a tremendous to-do in the palace. The old nurse was packed off to her village in disgrace, the King and Queen both looked

very much annoyed, and when Umadacitta peeped out of her window the people could see that she was crying bitterly. The King summoned all his sons to a family conference. "It looks as if the soothsayers were going to be right after all," he told them. But Abhaya, the eldest brother, was all for moderation. "We may as well talk it over as men of the world," he said, "and it might be a girl."

"Perhaps you're right," said the King. "And this young jackanapes comes of very good family. Suppose we give our consent to the wedding."

"Very well, then," said the other sons.

But they whispered among themselves: "If it's a boy we will slay him."

Umadacitta guessed what her brothers were thinking, and when a new nurse arrived to look after her, for soon she became very ill, she whispered into her ear and gave her all the money in her purse. For on the day that she was married her father had given her a thousand pieces of gold to spend on what she liked. And one day a village woman was smuggled into the palace with a little baby in her arms. She scuttled out again in an hour or two, still nursing a little baby, but this one was a boy and the one she had brought in had been a little girl.

And Umadacitta's brothers stopped whispering among themselves, "For," they said gladly, "our sister has a little girl."

And that day the King Panduvasudeva died, and Abhaya, the eldest and kindest of the brothers, ruled in his stead.

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A meddlesome soothsayer of the Court sat weaving spells and making divinations after his evening meal, and in this wise the ruse practised by Umadacitta upon her

family became revealed to him, so that he rose up and hurried to tell the King's brothers what had befallen. These tidings of their sister's deceit became known to them as the Princes were about to set off hunting in the forest. But though their hearts were full of malice towards Umadacitta they tarried not in riding forth to the chase, and soon overtook the village woman hurrying to her house with Umadacitta's son hidden in a basket.

"What have you got there?" said one.

"A sweet cake for my daughter," said the woman, for she had been well rewarded.

"Show it to us," said the Princes.

Luckily for the boy he was under the protection of demons, who immediately caused a huge boar to spring forth out of a neighbouring covert. Full of anger as they were, the Princes were great sportsmen. They immediately spurred away after the boar, and were quickly lost to sight in the jungle. Trembling for her escape, the woman gave the baby to an old man whom the noise of the hunting had attracted thither, at the same time pressing into his hand the money she had received from the Princess. When he reached his village the old man found his wife had borne him a son that very day.

"Is it a boy?" asked the neighbours.

"Twins," he said.

When the Prince and his foster-brother were seven years old the soothsayer revealed to his uncles where the boy was hidden, and suggested a plan for getting rid of him.

For all the boys of that village were wont to play in a small pond. The Prince, who was venturesome, had found one day in diving a certain hollow tree that had a hole below the water, through which he could creep inside the tree and stand upright, breathing freely. He would

often stay long therein and come forth in the same way, never giving the secret away to his playmates, but leading them to impute his disappearances to the power of magic.

One day, acting on the soothsayer's advice, the uncles sent their servants to kill all the little boys as they bathed in the pool. Warned by a demon, the Prince kept his clothes on, dived into the water, and stayed hidden in his hollow tree. And when the servants had counted the clothes and killed all the other boys, they went and told the uncles. "All the little boys," they said, "are dead."

So the Prince stayed with his foster-father until he was twelve years old. He was lonely at having no one to play with, for his foster-brother was the only one of his own age left in the village, and the Prince thought him a dull boy. He had never played with the others in the pond because he hated getting his feet wet. So the Prince asked if he might go and do odd jobs for the herdsmen.

Then the uncles found out again that the Prince was still alive, and sent for their followers, ordering them sternly to do better this time. That very day the herdsmen killed a deer in the forest and sent the Prince back to the village to bring fire that they might roast it. The Prince went home, but on the way he cut his foot on a stone, so he asked his foster-brother if he would mind carrying back the fire. "They are sure to give you some roast venison," he said, "because they promised me as much as I could eat." So his foster-brother hurried to take the fire to the herdsmen, and just as he reached them the uncles' followers surrounded the whole party and killed them. When they had eaten the venison themselves they went back and told the uncles.

The Prince was sixteen when his uncles found out that he was still alive after all. "We shall have to do the job ourselves this time," they said, and they got so angry and

excited that Umadacitta overheard what they were talking about. She realised there was no time to be lost, and sent a trusty slave to the Prince with a thousand pieces of money and an earnest request to him to put as much distance as possible between himself and his uncles. The message and the money came safely to hand, and on the advice of his foster-father the Prince made the best of his way to a far province. He inquired whether there dwelt in those parts a holy man called Pandula. One showed him a house, and a holy man came out of it and asked the Prince: "Art thou Pandukabhaya, my dear?" for that was the name Umadacitta and her mother (who was in the secret) had given him at his birth.

"That am I," said the Prince.

"O, happy day," said the holy man. "Thou wilt be a King, my dear, and shalt rule for seventy years, and I will teach thee the art of governance." Which he did, and his own son, Canda, shared the holy man's instructions, and profited much thereby.

Later on Pandula gave the Prince a hundred thousand pieces of money, and told him to enlist soldiers to help him fight for his kingdom. When five hundred men had been so obtained, Pandula prepared to take his leave of the Prince, but first laid upon him two parting injunctions.

"For thy Queen," he said, "take unto thee the maiden at whose touch leaves turn to gold, and for the chief of thy ministers take thou my young son, Canda."

Pandukabhaya thanked the holy man for all he had done for him, and seeing with pride how many warriors flocked eagerly to his standard, he set forth to make war, proclaiming his name and the merits of his cause.

So with his army he came marching into a valley where the fields grew ripe to harvest. This land paid tribute to one of the Prince's wicked uncles, but Pandukabhaya

himself was ignorant of it. His uncle, however, was directing the labour of his reapers, while his daughter Pali, a Princess of rare loveliness, made it her task to supply food and drink to her father and his vassals as they laboured in the fields. Some of Pandukabhaya's scouts saw this lovely maiden at her charitable task, and sent back word of her beauty to their Prince, whereat Pandukabhaya came driving furiously in his own chariot, and halting beside the Princess asked her where she was going. She gave him fair speech, and, his heart filled with love, Pandukabhaya craved that with her own hands she might give him to eat and drink also.

So she stepped down from her chariot and at the foot of a banyan tree graciously offered the Prince food in a golden bowl. Thinking to entertain his soldiers, she plucked banyan leaves on which to offer them refreshment also, but on the instant the leaves were changed into golden vessels. Pandukabhaya marvelled at this till he bethought him of the holy man's injunction, whereat he saluted the maiden, lifted her lightly into his own chariot, and rode on, fearless in the midst of his mighty warriors.

Pali's father was furious at such presumption, and dispatched the whole of his army in pursuit of Pandukabhaya and his men, and lo, in a few hours, of this army only a battered remnant straggled back, and a like fate befell the Princess's five brothers, and all their following. And in these great victories did Canda, the son of Pandula, prove himself a mighty captain and terrible in battle.

So Pandukabhaya held the lordship of all the country to the farther shore of the River Mahaweliganga, and sojourned there four years. And there his uncles led another army to battle against him, and he chased them back and held their fortified camp two years. But when Abhaya, the only one of his brothers not of a heart altogether evil, would have made peace with him, the other



nine brothers reviled Abhaya and conspired to deprive him both of his sovereignty and his life.

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In those days, hard by the Dumarakkha mountain, on the borders of Pandukabhaya's realm, a beauteous fountain bubbled forth, fair and clear, and in the pastures about its brink there grazed a horse, fleeter than lightning, with a white body and red feet. Travellers passing the fountain often saw this beautiful horse as it scoured the plain with scarlet hoofs, and tidings of this wonder came to Pandukabhaya.

So the Prince took a noose and set forth alone to capture the horse. The beautiful creature was really a magic horse, and when he saw the Prince artfully drawing near with the noose and marked his fierce and commanding mien, the horse kicked up his vermilion heels and fled like an arrow from a bow. So swift was his flight that the horse had no time to make himself invisible, yet whenever he turned his head Pandukabhaya was just behind. So the horse and the Prince circled the fountain seven times, with the speed of lightning. Then the horse plunged into the deep and swift Mahaweliganga river, yet the Prince followed, and climbing forth again he fled seven times round the Dumarakkha mountain, and three times more he circled the fountain, and plunged a second time into the river at the ford called Kacchaka. But the Prince swam beside him, and seizing the horse by its mane he grasped with the other hand a palm leaf that came floating down the stream. Now the demons who protected the Prince turned this leaf into a great sword, and he thrust at the horse with the sword, crying: "I will slay thee."

Then the magic horse spoke.

"Do not slay me, Lord," he said, "and so will I conquer the kingdom and give it to thee."

The Prince perceived that this was no ordinary horse, so still holding him by the neck he bored his nostrils with the point of the sword, and thus secured him with the noose that he had been carrying. But now the horse would have followed the Prince anywhere, rope or no rope.

Afterwards the Prince grew so fond of the horse that he was scarce ever out of the saddle, and never thought of walking so much as a yard, and four years he dwelt on the Dumarakkha mountain, training his armies for war. Then with his soldiers he rode to the mountain Arittha, and for seven years practised his armies in the art of battle, daring his uncles to come out and attack him.

And there came a day when eight of the Prince's uncles, having assembled together a huge army, rode forth and surrounded the Arittha mountain on every side. When he saw his enemies the Prince took counsel with the magic horse. Acting on the advice of the horse the Prince sent forward a company of soldiers bearing kingly apparel and splendid weapons to the camp of his uncles, whom in a letter he besought with fair words for peace.

At this his uncles rejoiced. "He is afraid," they said, "and when he rides forth to greet us we will take him prisoner."

But now the Prince mounted his magic horse and led forth his mighty army to battle. The magic horse neighed loudly and terribly, ten thousand of the Prince's warriors shouted their war-cry, and his soldiers who had carried gifts to the uncles raised an answering shout and fell upon their enemies where they stood, and the whole host of the Prince joining battle overcame all the enemy's army so that not a man remained alive. And of the eight uncles all were killed with their followers, and so was the prophecy of the soothsayers fulfilled.

And of the skulls of the vanquished the Prince's men raised a great pyramid, and at the top of the heap the

skulls of the eight wicked uncles gleamed yellow in the sun.

The Prince meditated upon the skulls of his enemies, where they lay piled in a pyramid.

"'Tis like a pile of melons," he said. "A heap of yellow melons."

So having won his kingdom by valour, Pandukabhaya came to the dwelling of his great-uncle, Anuradha, and hard by, on the advice of the soothsayers, he founded the fair capital of Anuradhapura. The state parasol of his uncles, taken on the battle-field, he caused to be brought thither and purified in the sacred pond, and with water from the same he consecrated himself and the beauteous Pali, his Queen. On the young Canda he conferred the office of First Minister, and the magic horse and the demons that had befriended him he housed in the royal precincts with fitting honour. Abhaya, his eldest uncle, who had dealt kindly by him, he made Guardian of the City by Night, and to his father-in-law he gave the lordship of a rich province. And now that his eight other uncles were dead according to the prophecy, he reigned seventy years in the fair city of Anuradhapura, and on days of festival he sat before his subjects in an exalted seat, having gods and men to dance before him, and taking his pleasure in joyous and merry wise.

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On the day that Viharadevi the Queen bore her lord a son were seen in Lanka many miracles and wonders. By the merit of this noble child alone there arrived, from one place or another, seven ships laden with manifold gems, and in like fashion an elephant of the six-tusked Chaddanta race was moved to bring thither his young one, foaled by the sacred Himalayan lake. So when a fisherman called Kandula perceived this splendid creature

fanning his ears proudly by the shore, he told the King of it, and the King sent his trainers to bring in the young elephant, and he was nourished with all care in the royal stable. And because Kandula had lighted upon him where he stood fanning his ears, so was the name Kandula given to the elephant.

The elephant Kandula abode in the royal stable, decked with splendid trappings and richly nourished, until the King died. Now at that time Gamani his first-born and Tissa his younger son each held lordship over half the kingdom, for from their youth these princes had dwelt apart. The news of their father's death coming first to Tissa he carried out with all ceremony the funeral rites of the King, usurping the dignity of his brother. Thereafter, taking with him his mother Viharadevi and the elephant Kandula, he fled speedily to his stronghold of Dighavapi.

When he heard of his brother's presumption, Gamani was filled with wrath. He had himself consecrated King without the loss of a moment. Then he sent Tissa a very curt letter.

"Send back the elephant Kandula and my mother," he said. For he regarded the elephant as of even greater importance than the Queen.

The Prince Tissa did not trouble himself to compose any answer, but went about improving the defences of his stronghold.

Gamani sent his brother two more letters, growing more and more ejaculatory in his language, but no answer came back. Seeing that his brother meant to defy his authority, Gamani set forth to make war upon him. Yet the preparations made for the encounter by Tissa being far more elaborate than his own, Gamani and his following found themselves roughly handled. Many thousands of the King's warriors fell in the field, and he himself only

escaped through the fleetness of his mare and the good will of the demons, who were friendly towards him on account of his piety and exemplary life, and so raised up a mountain between his pursuers and himself.

Learning caution from experience, Gamani waited till he had assembled sixty thousand warriors well exercised in arms before he again returned to attack his brother. When his army drew in sight of Tissa's camp great was the chagrin of Gamani to see how his brother was mounted upon the elephant Kandula, whom Tissa drove upon Gamani to overwhelm him. But the King's skill in horsemanship enabled him to prance lightly in a circle about the elephant, seeking how he might best hew at his brother with his sword. Finding no unguarded place he spurred his mare so that she leapt clean over the elephant's back, though the mighty blow which he dealt in mid-air only scratched the tough hide of the elephant Kandula.

Inspired by the gallantry of their leader, Gamani's warriors fell upon the armies of Tissa and scattered them to rout.

The elephant Kandula wept huge tears of mortification.

"A creature of the female sex has used me contemptuously," he reflected with bitterness, "and the fault is that of the feeble being who bestrides me."

So turning aside from the battle he rushed beneath a large tree, with intent to scrape the cowardly prince from his back and trample him. Tissa leapt nimbly upon a branch and clung thereto like a monkey, while the elephant in disgust sought out his rightful lord and bent his knees before him. Gladly Gamani mounted the elephant Kandula, and rode in this wise to his royal palace.

After seven years the King forgave his brother, and thereafter allotted to him direction of the work of harvest. Then the King by reason of his virtue made a plan for the punishment of the Damilas, seeing that men of this race

went about seeking to shatter the sacred memorials and throw down the walls of the shrines by night. Mounted therefore upon the elephant Kandula, with chariots, troops, and apes riding upon horses, and before him a relic borne upon the point of his own spear, he journeyed forth to acquire glory and merit. Many strongholds of the Damilas he overthrew and destroyed, and so drew rein at last before the mighty citadel of Vijitanagara. Pondering how he might encompass the downfall of this stronghold he made trial of his paladins, for among his captains were ten commanders each having the strength of ten elephants. Of these none was of a strength surpassing Nandhimitta, who as a boy was wont to go about by night hunting the Damilas who desecrated the temples, and catching them, was wont to tear them asunder, treading one leg down with his foot while he grasped the other, and so casting their limbs over the city walls. And to judge whether his strength remained to him the King commanded the elephant Kandula to seize Nandhimitta and overpower him; yet seeing the elephant come upon him Nandhimitta took him by the tusks with bare hands and so forced him to his haunches. Whereat the King was glad, but the elephant Kandula was filled with bitter grief.

Then the King's warriors set out to storm the stronghold Vijitanagara. The Damilas within shut fast the four gates, and at each gate the King's paladins did great deeds and slew many Damilas. For the city was guarded by a lofty wall and three deep trenches, and its four gates fashioned of iron cunningly welded.

Placing himself upon his knees, the elephant Kandula battered to earth stones, bricks, and mortar, while with his tusks he smote upon the gates of iron. And the Damilas standing upon the towers hurled down balls of red-hot iron and molten pitch on the back of the elephant. Tormented with pain, Kandula turned from the gates

and was fain to betake himself to a pond, and wallowed therein for ease of his pains.

Thereat the King's paladins mocked the elephant Kandula.

"None of us are here for our health," they shouted; "and don't imagine that these gates have fallen down yet, because they haven't."

Then the elephant Kandula gave one mighty heave, and trumpeting with rage he lurched up out of the pond and stood heedless of his wounds, and when the elephant's physician had washed away the pitch and anointed him with balm the King himself mounted the elephant, and stroking his temples he encouraged him and spoke him fair.

"To thee, dear Kandula," he said, "I give the lordship of a prince over the whole isle of Lanka, as if thou hadst been my son."

When slaves from the royal stables had given him choice fodder, and put upon his brow and shoulders his armour and about his back and belly bound a sevenfold buffalo-skin and above it a hide steeped in oil, Kandula set forth to destroy the gates. Roaring like thunder he came, daring danger, so that with his tusks he pierced the panels, and ground to powder the threshold beneath his feet. And so the towers of the gate fell about his shoulders, but these did the paladin Nandhimitta dash aside with his arms, and for this service Kandula ceased from his former wrath towards Nandhimitta, and loved him. Then with the elephant Kandula all the paladins broke down the walls of the stronghold, each for pride in a different place. The paladins whirled whole trees and huge timbers in their hands, the elephant Kandula brandished in his trunk a cart-wheel bound with iron, and rushing through the stronghold Vijitanagara they smote the Damilas and ground their bodies to pulp.

And in like wise the elephant Kandula wrought mighty

deeds in twenty-seven other battles which the King Gamani fought against his enemies, and when he had subdued them all and reigned at peace in his fair capital of Anuradhapura the King gave to Kandula the prerogatives of a prince having lordship over his whole realm of Lanka. Splendidly caparisoned, having a hundred slaves to minister to him, the elephant Kandula walked abroad at his pleasure, calling no man master save only the King.

. . . . .

A certain King in Kalaniya married a Queen more beautiful than virtuous, whose lovers were wont to send her messages by the hand of a slave wearing a monk's habit. As the King went one day forth from the palace with his consort the slave dropped a letter from the folds of his garment, even as he stood by the door in the habit of a monk. The King, turning quickly, saw what had been done, and in his wrath he slew both the slave and a holy man who did but stand by his side, knowing naught of the trick. Wroth at such impiety the sea-gods made the sea overflow the land, and to appease them the King put upon a golden ship his beautiful and pious daughter Devi. On the ship was written, "A King's Daughter," and so the King launched her upon the sea, and saw her no more.

Yet was the lovely and blameless damsel guarded by the spirits, and so came safe to the shores of Lanka, where the King made her his Queen, and from that time her name became Viharadevi, and she bore the King two sons.

The first-born was the Prince Gamani, at whose birth befell manifold wonders and auspicious omens, and the other was Prince Tissa, who warred with his brother for the kingdom. Now Tissa was unworthy, but from his boyhood was Gamani great in war and in devout works.



Yet in their childhood the King, full of pious zeal, sought to rear up both his sons in like manner, so that they might shun evil ways and glorify the doctrine.

The King made it a habit on days of festival to set rice-milk before five hundred holy men, ministering to them with his consort Viharadevi. And when they had eaten, the King would gather what remained into three portions, placing the same before his sons.

"Never, my dear ones," he would say, "will we turn away from the holy men, the guardian spirits of our house. With such thoughts eat ye these portions."

And further he would say:

"Ever will we two brothers be without enmity one towards another. With such thoughts eat ye these portions."

And obediently the brothers devoured each his portion as if it had been ambrosia.

Then to try his sons would the King say:

"Never will we fight with the Damilas who desecrate the sacred shrines. With such thoughts eat ye these portions."

Now Tissa had enough wits to know what might be expected of him here, and so dashed the food away with his hand, but Gamani, whose heart overflowed with wrath for the trespasses of the Damilas, went farther.

Not only did he throw his portion of rice on the ground, but went and cast himself upon his bed, neither bestowing his limbs in easy wise, but curling up both hands and feet, and so lay cramped upon his bed.

Then his parents marvelled, and his pious mother Viharadevi caressed Gamani.

"What are you behaving like this for, my darling son?" she said.

"What do you think?" answered Gamani. "When over there across the Mahaweliganga river are the

Damilas, and on the other side here is the ocean, how can I possibly lie down in any other way?"

And the worthy King his father heard the words of his son and was silent.

By the time he was sixteen years old Gamani had mastered everything that a Prince ought to know. Skilled he was in guiding elephants and horses and in wielding the sword and the bow, neither did he turn aside from the pious precepts laid upon him by his father. And out of the impetuosity of his youth, and because the King had given into his command half his army, with troops and chariots, Gamani reviewed his host and sent boldly to his father, saying: "I will make war upon the Damilas." But the King grew old, and was fearful for his son, so he ordered Gamani rather shortly to keep his troops inside his own borders and let the Damilas alone so long as they abode on their own side of the river.

Gamani was highly annoyed at being snubbed in this fashion, so much so that he mocked at his father.

"If the King were a man he wouldn't talk in that feeble way," he told his companions. "I think he had better put this on." And he sent the King a woman's garment.

Angry indeed was the King when he saw his son's impertinence.

"Make a golden chain and bind this whelp," he said. "He needs protection badly."

And Gamani fled from his father's wrath to a far province.

Of the death of the King his father and how he warred with his brother Prince Tissa, one may read in the tale of the elephant Kandula. Yet in many other battles did Gamani overcome his adversaries and acquire merit and honour. And with the years he grew wise, and ever his piety increased, so that when his enemies mocked at his soldiers, crying falsely that Gamani's men knew not friends

from foes, and merely went about slaying whomsoever they encountered, the King made a solemn proclamation.

"Not for the joy of sovereignty is this toil of mine," he said, "but for the greater glory of the doctrine. Who says otherwise, lies, and for a token of this may the armour of my soldiers be turned to the colour of fire."

And even so it was, so that all men marvelled.

So after many battles, riding upon the elephant Kandula, and with his paladins supporting him on either hand, did Gamani subdue Elara, King of the Damilas, and with him the mighty and terrible champion Dighajantu, even though he leaped eighteen cubits into the air and slew every man of the first company of Gamani's troops. For he fell smitten by an arrow from the bow of Pussadheva, captain of the King's archers. And with his own hand Gamani slew Elara, as he sat mounted on the elephant Kandula, who overcame Elara's elephant with his tusks, and the body of Elara the King ordered to be buried with solemn rites, and did there build a monument, and at that place the Princes of Lanka were wont for many generations to silence their music when they rode by.

And in his last combat Gamani overcame Bhalluka, for he alone remained of all his foes, and this the King did through the guile of the elephant Kandula, who yielded his ground slowly, only halting at the appointed place of victory, though hitherto in twenty-eight battles he had never retreated. And Bhalluka was slain by the mighty Pussadheva, who let fly an arrow into his mouth as he stood casting insults at Gamani, and as he fell, Pussadheva sped a second arrow that twisted his body in the air, so that he lay with his head rather than his feet towards the King.

Thereafter, at the close of day, Gamani sat on the terrace of his royal palace, lighted with fragrant lamps and odorous with perfumes, having nymphs to dance

before him. Yet he knew no joy, mindful that through his great victories had perished a million human beings. And the holy men becoming through their merit aware of this, out of love for Gamani they sent eight venerable ones of their order to comfort the King.

When the holy men had mounted the steps of the royal palace, Gamani greeted them and did them reverence, and as soon as they were seated he craved to know the reason of their coming, so they told him of the concern the brotherhood had by reason of the King's grief.



"How shall I look for comfort, venerable sirs," said Gamani, "since it is entirely owing to me that a million have lost their lives?"

"How many did you say?" said the eight monks.

"I said a million, but that's only a rough estimate. Not more, I hope, and perhaps a few less, but it seems quite a lot."

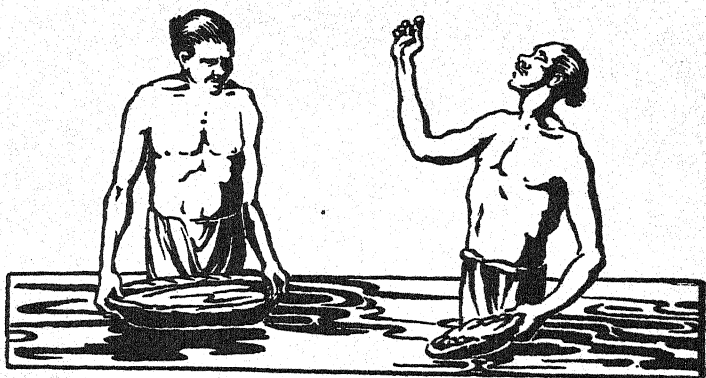
Then the eight holy men took counsel together, and turning to the King the eldest and most venerable of them spoke comforting words.

"We find, O Lord of men," he said, "that there has been a little mistake. By thy great and glorious deeds

arises no hindrance in thy way to bliss, or rather none to speak of. Strictly speaking, only one and a half human beings have been slain by thee. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, no more to be esteemed than beasts."

"I'm very glad to hear you say so," said King Gamani. And he clapped his hands and ordered the dancing girls to come up on the terrace again and repeat their performance.

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## CHAPTER VI

### GEMS

IF you honestly want to, are fortified by good advice or a smattering of expert knowledge of your own and approach the matter with the right balance of both caution and pluck, you can acquire a treasure of authentic gems in Ceylon, by which I mean enough to stock a decent jeweller's shop, for about the price of a new hat. You need not scoff, because I have done the thing myself, and it has often amazed me that more people who sojourn for any length of time in the island do not follow suit. Perhaps I had better qualify this by stating that your bargains will not include "freak" stones, Koh-i-noors, Hope diamonds, or roc's-egg rubies and sapphires, but it is the plain truth that if you buy judiciously you can fill your pockets with goodish small stones of every precious species barring diamonds, emeralds, opals, and a few exotic rarities, for no more rupees than the money-changer on the jetty will push over to you in exchange for a five-pound note.

Is this place, then, Tom Tiddler's Ground? Very

literally it is, and that throughout more than one province, though all other districts in the island make but a feeble combined showing against the rich alluvial deposits which for centuries have been worked (after a fashion) in Sabaragamuwa, where on its seaward side the sacred Peak declines in bold gradients that fall away round and about Ratnapura city. Here every other native you meet in the streets is either a professed or an illicit trafficker in gems.

Yet the irony of it is that though far from moribund (it could never be that), Ceylon's gemming industry has tottered for years on the verge of bankruptcy, yields nothing, or almost nothing, to the revenue, distracts the attention of thousands of potential agriculturists and husbandmen from honest work of another and very necessary kind, brings all too little benefit, material or æsthetic, to the traveller and tourist, and lines the pockets of no one, except a "family bandy" of immigrant Moormen, interlopers and parasites all from over the sea, who have the whole of the Ceylon gem trade in those podgy, avaricious, and beringed hands of theirs. For this there is no reason that I can think of except their own mother wit, the absence of any initiative and enterprise on the part of the indigenous Sinhalese, and finally, and by no means least, a certain mysterious official apathy. For some inscrutable reason Government appears to have preferred that the industry, from the cradle to the grave, through all its stages that is to say from the gem pit to the foreign market, should rest under a cloud.

But let me do them justice. Spurred by the importunities of unofficial enthusiasts, they really did go to the length a few years back of appointing a Committee, and the Committee, in due course, issued a report. Something more than a ridiculous mouse that was, too. One thing the document succeeded in doing was to give a competent and highly interesting survey of the whole gemming



A TRAP FOR TOURISTS





industry of Ceylon, for there were at least two people on the Board who knew what they were talking about. From their findings, then, one gathers that the first desideratum was to procure for the Crown its legal revenue, it being by law enacted that all precious stones unearthed both on Crown and private lands in the Kandyan province were *ipso facto* the property of the King, to whom was similarly due a tenth share of the yield of all private lands in the Low-country (including the Tom Tiddler's Ground of Sabaragamuwa). Secondly, and one is glad to see it, it was desired to protect the traditional interests of the Ceylon peasant in the exploitation of alluvial workings. "The recognised fact throughout the world," so runs the report, "is that alluvial diggings such as now exist in Ceylon are essentially the poor man's diggings." Treatment of such deposits differs essentially from the method in all "pipe" or "lode" formations. Surface gemming, in fact, is peculiarly adapted for development by people with little or no capital, who can rely at most times upon scraping up a living, though not a very fat one, by the primitive methods of surface working.

The idea, then, is to encourage the indigent peasant and discourage the bloated capitalist, to which end Government is urged to dry-nurse the small digger by issuing property licences freely at the nominal fee of two and a half rupees a month, to be available on specially proclaimed Crown lands. Claims are to be twenty feet square and no more. No man can hold more than one on his original licence, but he can acquire any number up to five others by purchase on payment of an extra transfer fee. There is a catch in this scheme, however. If, holding an "alluvial" licence, you strike a "pipe" or "lode" wherefrom accumulated treasures can be scooped out, so to speak, by the bucketful, the Crown steps in and dispossesses you. Your alluvial digging is "deproclaimed,"

and ceases to be anything of the sort. The arrangement is, perhaps, not unfair, but if you happen to be a poor peasant and do chance to uncover perhaps a barrow-load of sapphires by unearthing one of these pockets of supply, it must be rather irksome to have to turn the whole thing over again to His Gracious Majesty.

Further suggestions are made which have a lot to recommend them, notably for the immediate creation of a Mines Department with a properly qualified staff, the cost of which ought to be very much more than met out of the revenues of the industry once this is established on a proper basis. A  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent *ad valorem* duty on the export of all precious stones is likewise advocated, the licensing of all gem dealers, and the establishment of gem sales under such supervision as will enable the digger to escape being cheated. Perhaps the most practical recommendation of all advises the recruiting of a really expert staff of continental lapidaries. The Sinhalese cutter is clever enough in his own way, but nothing will deter him from sacrificing appearance to weight, cupidity, in fact, versus artistry, which defeats its own object. Practically every Ceylon-cut stone sent home has to go through the lapidaries' hands again. What's once done cannot be undone, and the aggregate loss to the producer is beyond guessing. Once modern methods are introduced and taught, and modern machinery brought within the Sinhalese lapidaries' reach, we shall see what we shall see. Hitherto Ceylon has been kept out of her heritage as the richest source of supply for the jewel marts of the world.

But let us away with stodgy talk of values and percentages and industrial anomalies, and beguile ourselves in lingering over the jewels themselves. Our lapidaries could have made a better job of it, could they? Well, they have done none so badly, for you will admit in a moment they had wonderful material. Come now with

me, not necessarily into one of the huge plate-glass fronted emporiums whose sleek custodians crouch behind the showcases, in their Western tailored suits of tussore silk, but merely into one of those tiny open dens in a side street, rubbish of porcupine quills, ebony, and cheap tortoiseshell in the window, and behind the bare boards of the counter a smirking and rotund old Moorman, in a funny fez-shaped hat (*not* a tarboosh; few Mohammedans wear them in these parts).

He knows what you have come for, and sweeping his arm beneath the counter he pulls up an armful of little bags of dirty canvas, spreads a cloth upon the board before you, and tumbles out rainbow cataracts of gems with a nonchalance that leaves you dizzy.

Piled before you, you can take them up in double handfuls and trickle them through your fingers like pebbles on the beach if it amuses you, are all the jewels in literature, barring diamond and emerald, and a lot more besides. Sapphires take pride of place, for more than half the sapphires in the world were mined within fifty miles of where you stand. These cerulean and midnight blues you know, but can those shimmering glories of violet, green, apricot, and blood purple be also sapphires? Verily they are, for your Ceylon sapphire is a protean beauty. Even yon King Topaz, Oriental Topaz (*Padmarachm* of the Sinhalese), Orange Ruby, call it what you will, that scintillating wonder as big as a young potato, is in reality none of these things, but merely a camouflaged sapphire. Treasured in little wallets or velvet-lined boxes of their own are other monsters that take your breath away, gems as large as thrush's eggs. One would need, surely, the wealth of the Indies to barter against baubles whose place would seem to be Monte Cristo's treasury, the vaults of a Delhi Mogul, or the rock-hewn sarcophagus of a Grand Cacique. Not a bit of it. You can have that one for

five thousand rupees, a mere bagatelle. Its colour is not perfect, or I should say it is not now quite at the top of the fashion curve, for the jewel market has queer whims and fancies. But what could you or I do with one of these unwieldy lumps of loveliness? A museum is the only proper place for it, unless you happen to be friendly with archbishops or crowned heads. Few of them find their way to Europe. They are useful here as decoys, and great the *cachet* bestowed upon its possessor by ownership of the biggest sapphire, cat's-eye, or aquamarine in the world. If you are to believe all you are told by the gem-dealing fraternity there must be a hundred such "unique" stones in Colombo alone.

Here, too, is the home of those fantastic beauties the "star-stones," sapphires and rubies both. A rough gem taken from the pit catches the artificer's eye with some unusual quality. Holding it to the light and twirling it this way and that, he sees its interior filled with a million opaque threads; there is the play of a curious silky sheen throughout the whole pebble. He knows what to do, and choosing with care the spot where the apex of its parabolic face shall come he cuts the stone *en cabochon*, and there, shifting and glinting on the curious semi-translucent ground of dove-grey or lilac-blue (with the rubies it will be a strange red, not unlike the red currant when the berry grows a trifle *passée*), is the perfect, unmistakable six-sided star.

There is an odd, almost sinister, beauty about all "chatoyant" stones. The Sinhalese treasure and venerate them almost above their market worth, but one rarely comes across them in the European market. A vogue, though, might easily arise that would send them bounding up in value, not that they are cheap even to-day.

Above all these, your Ceylon gem-fancier values the

cymophane or true cat's-eye, a really fine specimen of which you will find him loath to part with. Some people sneer at this stone and call it ugly, prosaic, dowdy even. Truly the lesser breeds of cat's-eye are insignificant enough, with no more magic in them than some of the duller agates and pebbles with which our Victorian grandmothers bedecked their decorous bodices. Yet the cat's-eye in the land of its birth is known in a thousand grades. The best have a strange green-yellow lustre, and the longitudinal ray gapes hungrily, incandescent, dazzling. Such gems have the diabolic beauty of some of the larger *felidae*, the black panther or the ocelot. "Chatoyant" is a good word, as jewellers' currency goes.

For what chances these scientific people have missed! The very names with which our forefathers christened their treasures in the olden days are jewels. Do but run over the catalogue of such baubles as a damsel of high degree brought with her for dowry in casket of ivory and silver, curiously wrought, or miser treasured in his strong-box. Emerald, sapphire, beryl, amethyst, aquamarine, topaz, jacinth, peridot,—there's music for you. Even the commoner, "semi-precious" breeds were dowered with lordly names, turquoise, chrysoprase, chalcedony, lapis lazuli, and jade, jasper, onyx. Not an Anglo-Saxon root among the lot, you say. Well, well, they are part and parcel of the world's heritage of language. Grant us at least our homely bluejohn and serpentine. But what can the wise men do for us to-day? Nothing, it seems, but a dull and wearisome repetition of "ites"—iolite, hessonite, alexandrite, rubellite, indicolite, crocidolite, and heaven knows what. And some of these ugly labels are attached to things really beautiful in themselves, hardly as you might suspect it.

I will tell you a story about that. Only a very few years ago certain mining or prospecting folk in Southern

California unearthed an exquisite rarity, a gem incontestably new to science. Not only was it something entirely novel, but a thing of extraordinary beauty as well, a stone of purest water and refulgence, tinged with the loveliest faint blush of wine-colour. You can see that very first of all such jewels ever lighted on by industrious man at the School of Mines in Jermyn Street to-day. Someone had to give the beauty a name. In fact, a special board of experts and professors sat upon the question. Weighty arguments were adduced advocating the adoption of this label or that, microscopes, jewellers' scales, all manner of fearsome instruments were produced and made use of in the discussions, which went on interminably. In the last resort a vote was taken, and what gem of terminology, think you, ultimately crystallised from the saturated solution of all this grey matter?

Why, *Kunzite*, to be sure.

But perhaps the compliment was deserved. Mr. G. F. Kunz, Tiffany's gem expert, is a very great connoisseur and, I am informed by those who know him, one of New York's most useful citizens.

They have not, yet, identified Kunzite in Ceylon. We have the rare spessartite though, that peerless variety of it burning with a fiery orange-red of singular brilliance, an exquisite jewel all but unknown in commerce, and before which the anæmic spessartites of North America pale into nothingness. And we have iolite, too, another rarity, wrongly called "water sapphire" by the jewellers in its colourless form. It has no affinity with the corundum group, and baffles all but the expert to identify, running through a chromatic gamut from violet and lavender to the most delicate straw-colour.

We pride ourselves too on our queenly aquamarines, which, of the finest sea-greens and blues, incomparable in lustre and unapproached elsewhere in the world in

size, abound among the alluvial gravel of the Central Province. Around Maskeliya and Talawakelle, in the high tea country, estate coolies often pick them up and put them aside till the itinerant Moorman turns up (he does it regularly, knowing what to expect), and pockets the treasure for a rupee or two. Did I tell you that the aquamarine and the emerald are twins, both beryls, though of the right emeralds there are none to show nearer than those mysterious mines in India whose location never seems to be quite settled? But all aquamarines save of the true sea shades go here as beryls, notable among them the yellow beauties, huge and flawless, of the Morawak Korale.

Would you know our alexandrites, quaint chameleon gems found first in Russia upon a Tsar's birthday, of a dull leaf-green by day and a sullen raspberry by night? Personally, I am indifferent to the attractions of this freakish and unlovely stone. Its colour is of bad quality, and its fire but a fretful and inconstant splutter, even in the best type that men dig over Weligama way. Yet you pay seven or eight pounds a carat for them in the shops, which is dear for Ceylon.

But if we missed finding the first alexandrite, one stone at least we have christened. Two hundred years ago and more the first certified parcel of Ceylon gems found its way to the markets of Holland, labelled "*Toramalli*" (Sinhalese *Turмали*). The Amsterdam lapidaries fell upon it, and quickly named a dozen old friends, which still left a great pile of gems more in number than all the rest. Of many colours, tests proved them all of the same species. Some call them Jargoons or Zircons, but tourmalines they were then and still remain for most people. Rose-red, pink, green, indigo, honey-yellow, the so-called "black," violet, and dull brown, you can match a tourmaline with each and every zone in the spectrum. They have one



odd quality, only lately discovered. Apply the X-rays to a dull and heavy-looking tourmaline and you can get as brilliant a colour as you would wish for. Intense heat will, of course, do this for you with one or two other stones, and in certain cases a complete colour metamorphosis will ensue.

There are our violet, blue, and ruby-red spinels of the corundum group, no rarities, but very typically stones of Ceylon, as is the hyacinth or cinnamon-stone (hessonite as above) which abounds in the paddy lands of Matara, and can be picked up for the trouble of walking. Its hardness is below that even of quartz, yet cinnamons of good colour and clarity continue in high favour.

The humble garnet is ubiquitous, though there are Ceylon varieties of him much esteemed by collectors, notably the dark pyrope of Kurunegala and the lighter "flower ruby" of Pallawela in Matara.

Come we then, lastly, to the moonstones, lowly handmaids of the greater gems, the ladies Sapphira, Esmeralda, and Rubina, and dames though of lesser degree still within the purple. Have not these humble ancillaries, not precious stones at all, says your precisian, their beauty, too? You would say so if the chance were given you to rake over the trays of our Colombo jewellers. The dull beads of silica, humble cousins of our British felspar, which find their way to Europe by the gross in tawdry brooches, bangles, and pendants, are depressing enough, I grant you, mere frozen drops of ammoniated tincture of quinine as seen when it meets the water in your tooth glass. Here you can trade for such by the sackful, plough through dry beaches of them if you like in your booted feet, where they lie thick as hailstones on the uplands of the Moon Plains. Hardly, you would think, could these others be moonstones too, these crystal dew-drops each of which prisons an unearthly elusive fire of moonlight

blue. Their fugitive and elfin charm is such that any cute young gentleman from Jo'burg who chose to buy out the ground-lords of our Meetiyagoda Mine, where most of the beauties are turned up, could in a year or two so "wangle" the supplies as to have all the gem marts of the world crying for moonstones, blue moonstones at any price.

Other divinities have their home with us. Outside the strict category of gems, perhaps, but consorting with them as equals by a traditional courtesy, lovely frail ladies of a half-world that is neither wholly organic nor wholly mineral.

"Beyond the bar of far Mannar the diver seeks for—Pearls."

You will find that line in no Victorian or Georgian anthology, but the librettists of our musical comedies have produced worse, I shouldn't wonder. Do you remember *The Cingalee*? You wouldn't, but you may take it from me that it was not bad for the type of thing. As for the loathly spelling that shies at the delicately balanced consonants of our Sinhala, I blame no one but the race of British editors of the baser sort, dull and incorrigible dogs who will never let the people learn.

But we were to speak of pearls. They have had, of recent years, a topical interest. Let me finish with that first.

It would have been odd if the fuss made over the success of Japanese enterprise in making "culture" pearls had not set Ceylon gem experts agog during the last decade or so concerning the chances, if any, of improving the island's pearl industry. From New York, for instance, comes the voice of a Mr. John Solomon, who several years ago was experimenting locally with a view to the production of a Ceylon culture pearl, but failed to secure effective backing either from the Government or private sources, thereafter making Rangoon the centre of his operations with some-

what more success, though the war put a premature end to his labours when his experiments with the culture of spherical pearls had only been in progress a few months. Subsequently he claimed to have some fresh facts to impart of such potential practical importance as to merit, or so one would think, the serious attention of Government.

What Mr. Solomon says is that his experiments in the production not of button but of round pearls as now carried on in Japan (he spent some months there in 1920 or thereabouts, obviously "taking notes") were so successful as to enable him to dispose in the markets of China, Japan, and Europe, after having conserved them all through the war during his service with the American Army, of every single spherical pearl of his own manufacture, without the abnormal circumstances of their origin being suspected by any one of the experts to whom they were submitted. There is no suggestion of sharp practice in these transactions. They were not offered specifically as "wild" pearls, a distinction now approved by the United States Bureau of Fisheries, and Mr. Solomon's contention is that the new type of culture pearls are not only true pearls, but are intrinsically likely to be as superior to the natural product as are the artificially cultivated varieties of the horse, the ox, the pineapple, the cabbage, or the rose. He tells us, moreover, of other things about the pearl which we did not know before. Hatton Garden experts and others claim to be able to detect any Japanese culture pearl placed among a parcel of natural pearls. Mr. Solomon admits that this can be done by any expert, but states that this is only on account of the greenish-yellow tinge of all pearls ripening in Japanese waters, a peculiarity shared with the product of the Venezuelan fisheries. Arguing from this, one would assume that the experts cannot distinguish the Japanese culture pearl from the natural Japanese pearl, a point which one would like to

see put to the proof. Those which expert buyers in Europe, China, and Japan purchased so readily from Mr. Solomon, pearls produced after only a few months' treatment in Burma waters, were of the varied shades of whites, greys, and pinks peculiar to the natural pearl of the Ceylon, Burma, and Persian Gulf fisheries. If they could be produced at Mergui they could obviously be produced at Mannar.

And there is another point of immense practical importance. In the more temperate waters of Japan the natural accretion with which the living oyster slowly clothes the nucleus that human ingenuity has insinuated within the living tissue of his epithelium takes at least twice the time to accumulate as is the case under tropical conditions.

What this process is, I may as well describe to you. The feat which these amazing Japanese have accomplished is, shortly, the imitation of a natural process in a fashion so ingenious in itself, so incredibly delicate in the manipulative surgical skill which it demands, as to induce in one considering the achievement the belief that Mr. Mikimoto and his associates deserve whatever material profit they can reap.

Briefly, the process can be summarised as the manufacture, from the live epithelium removed from the cuticle of one oyster, of an artificial pearl sac, and the transplanting of this sac, now charged with the artificial nucleus of the "culture" pearl that is to be, into the sentient tissues of another oyster, who is then dropped back into the sea to finish the job properly. His part, I may say, takes several years to perform.

Picture then with how light and skilful a touch the first oyster must be opened so that its body shall be dissected out from the containing shell without the delicate mantle suffering aught of injury. Watch, please, the little yellow man handle this naked and defenceless jelly as tenderly

as if it were a new-born infant. Pop in the middle of the quivering blob goes a five-grain globule of mother-o'-pearl, a tiny scalpel whittles out a disc of filmy epithelium with lightning quickness, prises it ever so tenderly from the tissue beneath, folds up the edges and brings all over (hast seen the apple in process of getting into the dumpling?). The fairy reticule, now filled and bulging, is whipped about the neck with a thread of fairy silk. You must remember that the whole thing has taken seconds merely, and that the operator's material is many times more friable and tenuous than the finest tissue-paper known.

But we are only half through. Bring up the second victim, ready at our elbow, his jaws gagged and agape to an angle sufficient to admit the surgeon's probe. The steel twirls in those uncanny fingers, and No. 2 suffers a quick puncture in one of his less vital parts. Gently, the little reticule is pushed within, the wound clips over it and closes. Even that is not the end. The scar, if you please, must be cauterised to stop the bleeding. Out now with the gag and drop No. 2 back upon his ocean bed. Not always, they tell us, can he be counted on to survive. Strange.

One wonders whether we shall ever catch up with people like that, years ahead of us in the field as they are. But we must pin our faith to Mr. Solomon. Someone has now gone to the length of proposing that the Ceylon Government should approach him with an olive branch. To retain his services while reviving experiments in pearl culture on the Ceylon banks will soon remain the only alternative to inviting Japanese co-operation, unless the local pearl industry is to be allowed to die out altogether. Either alternative suggests possibilities that will have to be put to the proof. It is, for one thing, more than likely that the Japanese would refuse to co-operate, or might at best offer to rent the Ceylon pearl fisheries for their own exclusive use, without offering to share the treasured

secrets of their new industry with any one. Conversely, Mr. Solomon might refuse his assistance, if, as is conceivable, he still cherishes any trace of resentment against Ceylon for her somewhat frigid reception of himself and his schemes.

Why exactly Ceylon should work herself up into such a state of excitement over these Japanese enterprises when she has never really put her heart into the task of exploiting her own pearl fisheries is not altogether clear. Not that any one would withhold from the Government credit for taking the thing up with tremendous keenness every few years or so, engaging all sorts of learned gentlemen to come out and draw up reports and handing these documents over to the Government Printer for reproduction. Very jolly reports some of them have been, too. Much that was formerly mysterious about the life-history and habits of the Ceylon pearl oyster has been made plain, and lots of new and remarkable sea-beasts discovered, catalogued, and described by the way, but the practical suggestions most of these people put forward before they depart to other hunting-grounds of research rarely seem to be acted on.

There was once a Ceylon Company of Pearl Fishers, now defunct, whose superintendent's parting words of advice to those he left behind him were that it would be folly not to make frequent and systematic inspections of all the rocky areas of the sea-bed off the island's western coast, from the fields off Karaitivu Point, that is, down as far south as Colombo. In many such places, he said, he had identified immense accumulated deposits of ancient oyster-shell, deducing therefrom that here natural beds had come into being, matured, and died of old age, without a single individual ever being the wiser. For I must explain how our oysters differ in habit from those of the Persian Gulf and the Somali coastal waters, where pearling is a never-ending business that goes on all the year round.

Our Ceylon oyster, you must know, is a nomad, and we catch him, if at all, only on the hop, in March and April, and at no other time. The life of a normal oyster is eight years at most, and his capabilities of producing a marketable pearl only become developed in the latter half of his existence. Nor is there any such thing as a "Ceylon-bred" oyster.

Ceylon coastal waters being in continual movement, swirling this way and that in swift and variable currents that in some way follow the seasons, but are never so constant as to be relied upon, no baby oyster spawned upon our beds is able to stay with us, he being a free and floating agent during infancy, though I take it absolutely helpless so far as any choice of his objective goes. North, south, east, or west, he bobs with the tide, eating and growing if food comes his way, expiring in disgust if he misses it. Assuming the gods to have been kind enough to put sustenance within his reach up till the age of six weeks or thereabouts, at which Nature requires him to retire below and establish, very literally, a *pied-à-terre*, he takes one last look at the sky, sinks gracefully to old Ocean's bed, and trusts in Providence to meet something solid that will bring him up short. Into sand or mud he disappears straightway, for evermore. If he be a lucky oyster his grand climacteric will synchronise with his achieving the harbourage of a bed of rocks or coral, or likelier still a submarine bar of such detritus as any river or considerable stream will wash out to sea. These last indeed would seem to be his favourite habitat, and once installed thereon he proceeds to flourish exceedingly. It is here that he sets to work to produce pearls, not for amusement or vanity, but by way of a plot to checkmate the activities of a tiny parasite in his inside. The longer this duel goes on, the bigger grows the pearl, whose successive "skins" are all the time in process of enwalling the offending stranger.

When his eight years are up the oyster dies a natural death, his byssus rots from the rock, his jaws gape asunder, sea beasts and the deep sea currents scatter his remains abroad, and maybe a pearl, fit perhaps for the aigrette of a Shahzada, sinks irrevocably into the ooze. Or an extra large pearl in an awkward part of his anatomy may bring about his premature decease, when the result is the same.

It is tragic to think how futile must be his nursery activities throughout his adult period. He was born on the Tuticorin beds, so he never was a native, rightly speaking. There is no hope, alas! for his offspring, here or elsewhere. Off they float, and are never heard of more, for Australia is more than a six weeks' journey for such frail morsels as these be. Even the Tuticorin-Karaitivu passenger is beset with perils, and only a strong monsoon will take him safely past the hungry mouth of Paumben Channel, which if he loiters in the jaws of it sucks in the little stranger to shoot him out again, should he survive the passage, into the inhospitable wastes of the Bay of Bengal. Even when he is lucky enough to find a good home in one of the "paars" of our western coast, Fate may still have its horrid surprises in waiting for him. Though he is no true oyster, but a somewhat stuck-up cousin merely of the plebeian British mussel, many sea-foragers there are that find him toothsome, notable among them the wolf-packs of the lower deep, the Giant Rays.

An Englishman, a jolly sailorman he was too, who knew more about the pearl banks than any other man alive, told me that at a certain preliminary inspection twenty years or so ago he borrowed a diving-suit and marked down the oyster bed of a dream. What he found was a huge patch of ideal "paar," acres of coarse granite sand, and shells of oysters dead and gone, welded by the busy coral polyp into a solid amalgam coated with millions of living oysters, larger and older than any he had ever



seen. That was in November, when these submarine reconnaissances are best made. He took a careful record of the bearings and passed on. Days later, homeward bound from neighbouring waters, he steamed over a shoal of colossal Rays on the move, hideous nightmare brutes ranging from the dimensions of a tea-tray to those of a full-sized billiard table. It was an extraordinary sight, but he never thought of connecting it with any possibility of danger to his precious oysters. Four months later, in the second week of the fishery, boats and men were piloted to the spot. Over went the divers, and were up again in no time, empty-handed. "No live oysters? Impossible!" So on went the diving dress and down went my sailor gentleman to the bed of beds. There was something to be seen, certainly. The place was now no bed but a cemetery, a Golgotha pillared with innumerable pale memorials to its departed dead. Away on all sides of him over the wide levels of the "paar," stretching as far as the eye could carry through that sea-twilight, were millions and millions of empty shells, the nacreous lining of each valve turned uppermost, glinting with a ghostly light. He picked up a handful, every shell without exception broken into three symmetrical pieces by the steel jaws and adamantine teeth of the wolf-pack.

It was the hero of this adventure, too, who used to tell of a certain four-mile walk he took on the floor of the sea, in this same diving-dress, *not* the one he originally experimented with, drawn from Government stores and found afterwards to be twenty-three years old. What happened that time was that a Sinhalese fisherman, about his workaday task of dredging for the juicy Mount Lavinia prawn (which indeed earns for that haven of week-enders and tourists the bulk of its hotel's dividends), brought up two oysters. Opening one, he found a pearl in it, for which a speculator on the beach made him a sporting offer of

ten rupees, promptly accepted. Finding that in five minutes it had changed hands again for six times that figure, the fisherman took himself and his alleged grievance before the Government Agent, hence much official excitement, the chartering of a launch, and the requisitioning of the fisherman as pilot. But the most gallant gentleman who put on the diving-dress sank like a plummet for nearly eighty feet, enjoyed an instant's vision of an oysterless wilderness of soft sand, took what was meant to be a huge breath, felt his chest buckle up like a collapsed air-balloon, and lost his temper and his consciousness simultaneously. In doing so he luckily jerked the life-line so hard as to inspire those above to haul for all they were worth. The air pump, of course, proved on examination to be long past work at that pressure. But that adventure did not deter him from borrowing the dress of an English diver just recruited for the harbour works and taking a submarine stroll one sunny morning. During four hours, the boat and his helpers drifted above him at varying heights, while he covered as many miles on the sea floor. A little helpless and nervous at first, yes, but that soon wore off.

Throughout those two months of pearling-time the water is safe to be as clear as glass, the sunshine on the sea-bottom is tempered to a radiance of pale emerald and jade, the tangles of the submarine forest wave long filaments dreamily across the intruder's path, or bar his passage altogether with soft but impenetrable thickets whose million fronds are in ceaseless rippling motion. Crowd about you, more curious than alarmed, rainbow-hued fish, striped, ring-straked, and spotted, gaudy as parrots; fish scaled or slimy-smooth, fish with heads like augers and bodies like curling whip-lashes, fish all heads and no bodies that come lolloping and goggling at you from their weedy lairs, and, should you wave a slow and ineffectual arm at them, swell to monstrous footballs, spike-armoured like a

crusader's mace. Around you, fans, trumpets, and lacy ferns of coral pattern the green background. Giant madrepores and sponges bulge in your path. Here the coral grows in white and branching trees, there in little dumpy bushes of lapis lazuli starred with flowers of a bright and startling blue, though all goes white when the flower dies.

And there is one famous bed known to the Tamil divers as "Ani Verlundun Paar" (elephant's ear rock). Here the coral takes the shape of the flat Turkey sponges you see in chemists' shops, or of the mammoth fungi of our own woods. I have seen it compared to leaves, or, a comparison which conveys nothing to me,<sup>1</sup> "the paper holder that a bouquet of flowers is contained in." Broadly speaking, "elephant's ear," which is the Tamil's own contribution, cannot be bettered. Some of these "ears" are a yard across, hard almost as granite, and most difficult to detach from their base without spoiling the edges of the leaf, which taper to the thinness of a knife. Here it is a joy to watch the naked divers at work. While you, an armour-plated, bloated Golliwog, stand feeble and all but paralysed, they swoop down to you like creatures native to this element. No diving-dress for your Arab or your Tamil, not even the horn nose-clip without which no Bahrein diver ever ventures below the surface; they do but hold their nostrils with finger and thumb of the left hand during the quick downward rush on the weighted rope, then swim freely hither and thither a foot or two from the sea-bottom with an easy paddling movement of all the limbs, backs and necks arched with the proud curve of the sea-horse, long black tresses rippling behind and above them like a mermaid's.

A basketful of oysters is gathered while their pent-up breath holds (with a Tamil not more than a minute, but

<sup>1</sup> Not when I wrote this, but it does now. Miss Fay Compton carries in the first Act of *Secrets* (period 1865), a tight little posy of rosebuds screwed up into an enormous funnel of paper lace.

with an Arab half as long again), and each strange figure soars skyward out of your ken. Should avarice or bravado keep him down too long he will collapse in the jerking agonies of a death most horrible, from which no efforts of those above who haul on the ropes will serve to rescue him.

Other dangers there are, though in these waters the sharks are the shyest and rarest of visitors. More to be dreaded, for his venomous filaments may be brushed against almost unawares, is the giant jelly-fish or medusa. They abound all round the coast at certain seasons, and are the dread of bathers, European or native. Contact even with a dismembered fragment of this devil's gelatine often sets up intense local irritation and a queer malaise of the nerves, affecting some people more than others, but always unpleasant. I have scrambled back to the rocks at Mount Lavinia with a livid blaze on my own shoulder and red-hot needles all down one arm, to see my Sinhalese boy dash into the nearby undergrowth and run back with a handful of some grass or weed (I never identified it) which, macerated and rubbed on the afflicted part, brings almost instant relief. Those who are stung and are attacked by dizziness should avoid alcoholic stimulant like the plague for some hours. I have seen a passenger whose nerves were shaken by a red-hot wire winding itself round his wrist in the surf toss off one liqueur glass of brandy and relapse straightway into a very good imitation of delirium tremens.

The very useful vegetable I have referred to is not, I believe, available in the vicinity of the banks, and it is the fishery officers' custom to make use of medicinal oils to relieve cases of jelly-fish sting among the divers. My sailor friend reported that he had even applied castor oil with success.

Super-pearls are rare with us, though there is somewhat

doubtful documentary justification for the popular ascription of a Ceylonese origin to many of the famous pearls of history, Cleopatra's ear-rings, for instance, valued at £161,000, and the single pearl worth £50,000 given by Julius Cæsar to the mother of Brutus. Here, too, the Phœnician of old, with his truly Semitic nose for treasure, came prowling round our coasts to pick up bargains in Ceylon pearls. Here Solomon's agents priced pearls to rope the bosom of his mistress Sheba. The Dutch held few fisheries in their stewardship of 140 years, the aggregate proceeds during their occupation coming to no more than £200,000. With their customary indolence, the Portuguese hardly fished the banks at all, though they seem to have had more to choose from, notably one at Mount Lavinia, which is known to have been fished, though no records have come down to us of the profits.

Ourselves have done better, though not too well. One "super-pearl," and only one, is on record as having been found within the last fifty years, a black pearl sold to Tiffany's, of New York, for something like £5000. There was an odd find, too, in Colombo harbour some years ago. Two common or garden mussels clinging to a buoy were pulled off and prised open. One held two large pearls of a delicate slaty-blue, the one a perfect and lustrous globe, the other flawed and misshapen.

We see to it in Ceylon that the ancient craft and mystery of pearling does not belie its name. Few outsiders know exactly where the banks are, and certainly we put up no beacons to encourage the inquisitive. A fishery happens when it happens, and that is all about it. It is generally understood that it is up to the official inspector to keep his weather eye open, prowl about the likeliest waters at the due season, which is to say November, lift a sample of at least twenty thousand oysters, extract the pearls by the

time-honoured process which I shall describe, and have their value assessed by that other ancient rite of the secret hand-clasp, which it should be noted here is the invariable procedure for pricing any gem in Ceylon, and nothing will induce a dealer engaged in any branch of the jewel trade to depart therefrom. No words whatever are exchanged during the business. Buyer and seller, or it may be the two joint assessors, hold each the other's paw, cover hands and wrists with a cloth, some kind of masonic intercommunication ensues of which the nature is not apparent to the bystander, and the bargain is made or the price fixed. When a real transaction is effected, any stranger present has a right to a commission on the proceeds, presumably as the price of his silence.

Obstinately, too, do the pearling fraternity cling to the old Portuguese or Dutch nomenclature throughout the "shop" of their calling. Even the valuations just described are made in terms of the ancient coinage, and have to be reduced to pounds, shillings, and pence by Government. Once a fishery is declared to be worth while, word goes out to the scattered brotherhood of divers, who are assembled at a kind of base-camp and numbered off into two equal bodies. It is exhausting enough work, and a day off and a day on is the rule of the fishery. One-third of each man's daily harvest is the immemorial due of every diver, and the gamble involved is just such as his Eastern soul delights in. Not that he is any pearl of honesty himself. A time-honoured dodge for besting the Government used to be for two men to conspire together, one of them having found a pearl of obvious value, the scheme being that the accomplice stole a small and valueless pearl and hid it, let us say, in his pants. He was then denounced with much vociferation and parade by his friend, the whole labour force stopped work and gathered round, and a tremendous hullabaloo ensued, while in the general

confusion the arch-criminal got away well with the real plunder. The staff work here involved is also of a peculiarly Oriental character.

The divers' third share having been allotted, the oysters (pearl-bearing or otherwise, no one knows at present, so the thing still remains a gamble) are dumped straight upon the beach, and the Government auctions the remaining two-thirds of the catch each evening when the boats come in. Why the State should not continue to direct the whole business nobody knows, but that is the way we have always done the thing in Ceylon. The private buyers bear off their purchases to their own "kottus" or enclosures, and leave them to rot for a week or ten days in a canoe or any large receptacle, shielded from direct sunshine or strong light, but deliberately easy of access to the flies. Not unnaturally, they are not odours of Araby that are wafted from the pearling camps at this stage. Putrefaction being more or less complete, the whole mess is rinsed repeatedly in clean water, miscellaneous rubbish all removed, and the residue left to strain on a black cloth. From now onwards lynx-eyed attention is necessary to avoid wastage. You will observe, for example, the precaution of the black cloth. Again and again the stuff is gone through, and long after the fishery is over and all the genuine pearling folk have departed the wild jungle women of this desolate coast may be observed scratching in the sand for the almost invisible seed-pearls that in bulk are in enormous request on the mainland, alike for the ornamentation of rich embroideries and the supply of *chunam* (powdered lime for betel-chewing) for princes and other very particular people who can afford these extravagances. But only the tiniest seed-pearls escape in this way, all other grades up to the size of an average pea or even larger being graded in colanders which run from the finest sieve-mesh up to a strainer

in which there may be twenty apertures within the circumference of an average-sized ash-tray.

I must tell you, too, of the manduck, who is by way of being an eponymous fraud. One manduck is allotted to each five divers in a boat, of whom there are ten, who dive and rest alternately. But the manduck never wets even the sole of his foot. His job it is to work the tackle, to see that all his five sinkers of shapely stone are firmly spliced to the ropes, and that these run freely over the outrigger contrivance which holds them clear of the gunwale. Standing on his stone, the diver takes the



biggest breath he is capable of, gives the signal to his manduck, and that his descent shall be the speedier heaves himself into the air as the manduck lets go the rope. When the pressure on the stone ceases the manduck hauls up again at once, and makes all taut and trim again, for the diver wants no aid on his upward journey.

Thus we did in the days of the Rajavali Chronicle, two thousand five hundred years ago, and precisely thus we do to-day. Steam launches have their uses for examination work and patrols, but in the actual process of oyster collection and the extraction of their precious freight we prefer not to adopt any of your scientific dodges. Some of them have been tried, and failed, European divers, for



instance, in full panoply, whom our Tamil and Arab amphibians left standing. The only difference nowadays is that there is no Tamil Princess doing policewoman's duty from a throne at the extremity of Karaitivu Point. Even that might be arranged, only it happens that the last three miles or so of the spit have gradually submerged since the Rajavali epoch, and telescopes, you will understand, are barred.



## CHAPTER VII

### DRUMS AND INCENSE

DROWSY, flower-fragrant Kandy, mountain stronghold of the last Sinhalese kings, sleeps placidly by its exquisite lake in a cup of the hills.

Royal bones moulder in forgotten graves, long since the proud race of Gamani and Parakrama flickered out in a line of cretins, feeble and debased shadows of aristocracy, but still in Kandy city stands the Holy of Holies for all the Buddhist pilgrims of the world, the Dalada Maligawa, or Temple of the Tooth.

Save on the yearly festival of the Esala Perahera, when the shrine is borne in splendid pageantry through the streets before the slow-pacing cohorts of the sacred elephants, only to princes and the august of the earth

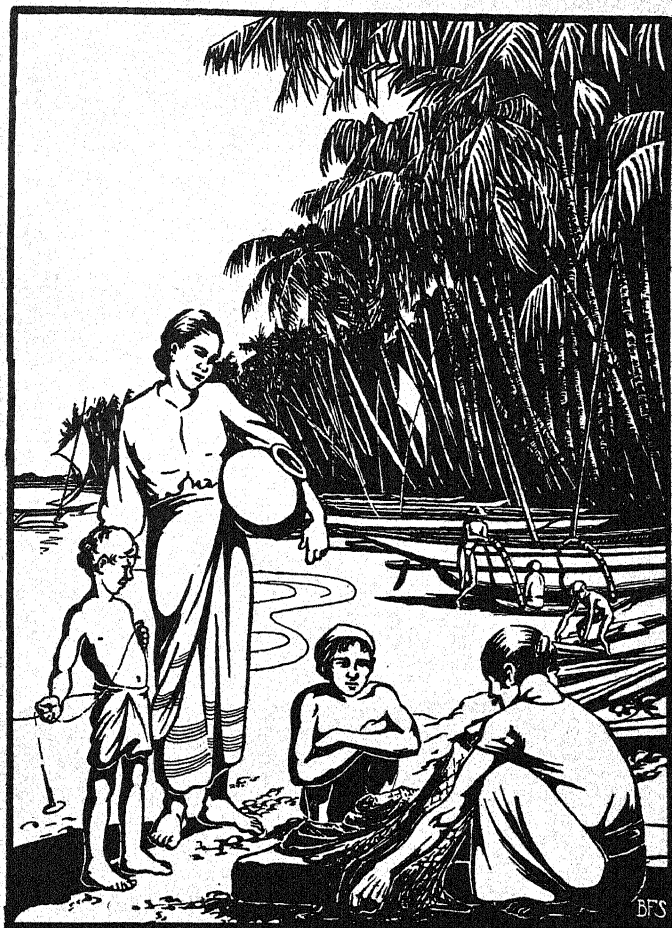
is vouchsafed a glimpse even of the casket that contains the precious Tooth. High honour, indeed, is it for a King's son to be shown the venerated Relic, even at arm's length, within the adytum of the Temple. To touch the Holy Thing would be to commit sacrilege unspeakable. A Crown Prince of Siam once insisted on his royal right to do so, and was sent packing by the outraged abbots, the offerings of his piety to the Temple, more than a King's ransom in jewels and treasure, bundled contemptuously after him down the steps.

What is it, then, this Holy Thing, this Relic itself that lies behind many padlocked doors, nestling at the heart and centre of a seven-fold dagoba of virgin gold, enclustered with all the jewels of the Arabian Nights?

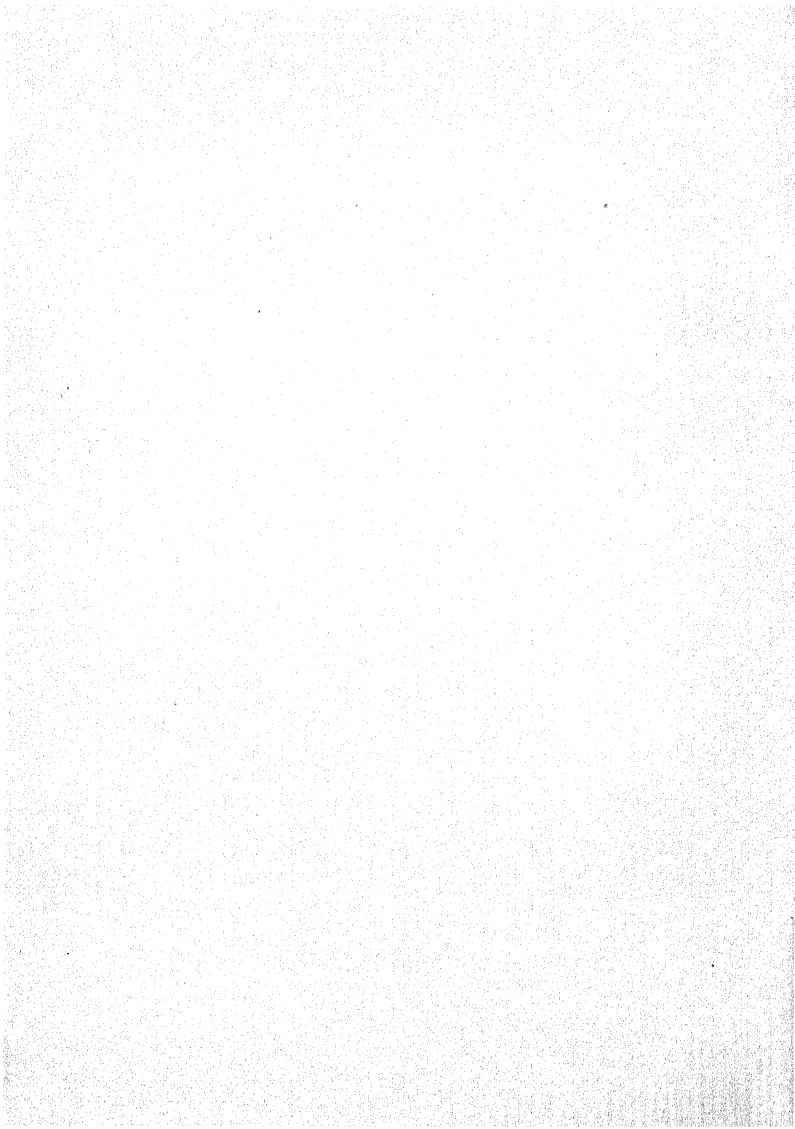
No more—I quote a luckier than I, who peeped once behind a royal shoulder—than “a small morsel of bone, in shape and size and outline like the two top joints of a man's little finger. It is browned and polished and smooth, carefully rounded and flattened at the broader end.” Superfluous to add, perhaps, that it is not only not the tooth of the Buddha, but not a human bone at all.

The polished tush, in fact, of some pig or boar that roamed the Kandyan jungles perhaps four hundred years ago. And how that came about is another story.

The Portuguese were at the bottom of it, so much is known. Yet have we not in the West the Handkerchief of St. Veronica, a thumb of St. Thomas, fingers of Andrew and John the Baptist, even of the Holy Ghost? We have more; an exact parallel provides us even with a tooth of Jesus, enumerated in Brady's *Clavis Calendaria* as among the twenty most famous relics of the world, though what cardinal or prelate has the treasured bone in his keeping I have no idea. Before such things our devotees bow down and adore in their hundreds of thousands. But of worshippers of the Tooth of Gautama there are four hundred



FISHERFOLK



millions. No Christian shrine has half the following. Can we show aught but respect for the pivot of such a multitudinous devotion? Should we, if we could, while Europe continues to cherish the "snout" of a seraph and a phial of the sweat generated by St. Michael when he contended with Satan?

Let me sketch, then, the history of the Danta Dhatu, palladium of the Buddhist faith, whose documented history opens in 543 B.C. with the funeral rites of Gautama at Kusinara, though even here confusion begins at once. Was the Relic the Lord of the World's right or left "canine"? The evidence is equally emphatic for both. Right or left, it was indubitably the Buddha's Tooth. For eight hundred years it abode in Dantapura, capital of the Indian kingdom of Kalinga, till, in the day when Maha Sena reigned over Lanka, the King of Kalinga found himself at grips with a potent enemy, and fearing disaster to the Holy Thing, called before him his daughter Raumali and told her what was in his mind touching the peril that beset the treasure of their house. So this fair Princess fled over the sea with the Relic hidden in her long black hair, nor slackened foot till it had passed from her hands to those, equally reverent, of Sirimeghavanna, now King of Sinhala in Maha Sena's stead.

A hundred years or so later Fa Hian, the Marco Polo of Cathay, came to Anuradhapura on his travels, and wrote upon his tablets concerning the magnificence of that temple erected by the faithful to enhouse the Buddha's Tooth, in so doing revealing to us that the Perahera was already an established institution. "It (the Tooth) was exhibited to the pious in the middle of the third moon with processions and ceremonies."

In Anuradhapura the Tooth rested for a thousand years, when the men of Madura came down from the north like the Assyrian of old, to burn, slay, ravish, and plunder.

High piled among the loot they bore home with them across Palk Strait was the very Tooth itself. Then a new King reigned in Sinhala, and by the grace of the gods he showed himself a man. He laid upon himself a mighty oath and kept it. His own ambassador, this Parakrama the King bearded his brother of Madura in the Tamil capital itself, won back the Tooth with words of wisdom, bore it home across the water, and installed it with all fit ceremonies in his new capital of Polonnaruwa. But they were troublous years which followed. From pillar to post fled the guardians of the Tooth as civil wars and invasions rent the land. Kings might win or lose the allegiance of the folk, veneration of the Tooth never faltered in its intensity. Whosoever possessed the Relic, to him sovereignty could in nowise be denied. Wherever and whenever war's alarms forced the temporal power to establish for itself a new court, so soon sprang up within the royal precincts, smaller no doubt, but a thousand times more ornate and beautiful than the palace of the King, a new Dalada Maligawa or Temple of the Tooth. At Kandy, at Cotta by far Colombo in the west, at Delgamoia in Saffragam, at Kotmalie, it lay by turns. Saffron-robed priests fled through jungles, swamps, and rivers bearing the precious Thing, and skulked in caves and among rocks till the danger passed.

It remained, as I have said, for the Portuguese to commit the crowning sacrilege. Three hundred and fifty years ago or so, for that was the date of it, will take us back as you are aware to the Inquisition, when zealous Catholic gentlemen used to pursue the errant Protestant, and, having caught him, apply racks and thumbscrews till he denied his God. Nor should it be forgotten that in a bare century fortune's wheel had given the zealous Protestant his turn, and left our English Papists in a sad way.

There is a tale that tells how in 1560 Don Constantine de Braganza ravished the Tooth from its hiding-place, took it with him to Goa, and handed it over to the Archbishop, who burned the horrid fetish of the heathen and idolater before the very eyes and under the orthodox and scornful noses of the Viceroy and his Court. Another account relates how a Portuguese bishop on the spot managed the affair out of hand at Kandy, having the abomination ground to powder and casting the same with maledictions into the Mahaweliganga river.

The point is that the Tooth was certainly destroyed at this period, and as certainly re-materialised by a miracle within a short five years. The faithful knew the Thing indestructible, priests and abbots stifled reason with a *credo quia impossibile*. Various explanations of the miracle are extant. Here is one.

The King of Pegu, in 1566, learning from astrologers that he should wed a Sinhalese Princess, demanded of Dharmapala, the King of Ceylon, whose Court lay then at Cotta, the hand of his daughter. This request was esteemed an honour, as no doubt it was, but the reflection occurred to Dharmapala that by the stupidest accident conceivable he did not happen to have a daughter. Gross carelessness, of course, and excessively annoying. Out of the question to offend our brother of Pegu. Let the Court Chamberlain be summoned.

"Why is it, O Chamberlain, you have neglected to remind us there are no princesses in our royal nursery? See what you have let us in for!"

But the Chamberlain knew his job. Let not Majesty upset itself over trifles. The Chamberlain (with respect) himself boasted a tincture of the royal purple, claiming indeed some sort of second cousinship with the Presence itself. He had a daughter. Sensible, bouncing girl, too. Bound to suit.



"Very well," said the King. "Just arrange about the birth certificates and things, will you?"

"There need be no deception, Your Majesty. The Dalada, falsely supposed to have been destroyed by the Christians at Goa, is still in my house. Your Majesty will perceive that in certain eventualities my claim as a candidate for the prerogatives enjoyed by Your Majesty would be a strong one."

"As to that," said King Dharmapala, "we don't believe a word of it."

If you will compare the dates, you will see that Fa-Hian the Chinese traveller was noting down the details of the Anuradhapura Perahera just about the time our own woad-smearred ancestors were deploring that cracking-up of the Empire of Old Rome which left English byres and homesteads open to the ravages of Pict and Scot. From that day to this the ritual has not altered. All is the same, save that the essential symbol upon which the devotion of four hundred million people is centred has been destroyed by the fanaticism of a Christian priest, and a substitute of brutish origin does duty in its place.

It is a hundred years since the ritual of the Perahera was described in detail for the edification of a British Government by pundits of the Faith. Few are aware that it commemorates the birth of Vishnu, the god "who is in colour like the blue lotus," to whom Indra, Lord of all Gods, deputed out of respect the guardianship of Lanka when the Incomparable One lay upon the bed of his Nirvana, "having fulfilled all his duties in the world."

Quoting then from a summary of the rubric which is followed in strict detail to-day, the procedure is for the people of the four principal Dewalas (hostels within the temple precincts where women could be accommodated, which owe their origin to the Sinhalese kings who took

their brides from India and required their attendance at religious ceremonies) to pick out a young jak tree, not yet in fruit, the trunk of which is three spans in girth. They clear the ground round the tree and consecrate it by fumigation with the smoke of burning resin, smearing it with a preparation of sandal, and further by an offering of a lamp lighted with nine wicks, placed at the foot of the tree with nine betel leaves and nine different kinds of flowers, arranged on a chair. This being done, the wood-cutter of the Maha Dewala, dressed in a clean cloth and purified by washing and rubbing himself with the juice of a lime, with an axe fells the tree at its root and cuts it transversely into four pieces of the same length, these to be divided among the four Dewalas.

On the day of the new moon of the month Esala, each piece is "fixed into the ground" in a particular spot in the Dewala, and a roof erected over it; it is then covered with cloth and decorated with white olas, fruits and flowers. Thus prepared, the logs are called "Kapa" (i.e. Pillars—"Esala Kapa, made sacred with all customary ceremonies"). Till the fourth day from that in which the pillars were "fixed," the kapurales carry round the Kapa, morning and evening, the bow and arrow of the gods to whom the temples are consecrated. Tom-toms are beaten, and canopies, flags, "talipots," umbrellas, and fans displayed. The bow and the arrow were localised as "the god, and the (act of) carrying them round the Kapa is called carrying the god."

On the fifth day of the Perahera, the Kapurala brings the bow and arrow to the gate in the street, and places them in the "ranhilligé" on the back of "the" elephant. The elephants of the four Dewalas, bearing the bows and arrows of the four gods, are led to the "Maluwa (compound) Vihara" wherein the chiefs and the people assemble. At the same time the Budho Priests of the Maligawa bring

to the gate of the temple the Datukarenduwé (the shrine holding the Relic of the Buddha) and place it in the "ranhilligé" on the back of an elephant, who remains at the gate. In the meantime the procession moves from the Maluwa (between the Maha and the Nata Dewalas), making a circuit round the Nata Dewala on its way towards the Maligawa, where the Relic of Buddha is in waiting.

These ceremonies are performed during five days of the Perahera. The five days having expired, another ceremony, Randoli Bema—"an important and essential part of the Perahera"—lasts five days more. First are brought in from the Dewalas the "randolies" (or palanquins), four in number, each dedicated to a particular goddess, and furnished with a golden pitcher and sword similarly dedicated. These palanquins form a part of the evening processions and are "then carried by the people," following the bows and arrows; but in the nocturnal processions they take the lead. Herein also the women of the Dewalas participate, and "in the King's time" the "daughters and the young wives," dressed in royal apparel, accompanied the "randolies" of each goddess. The procession would also include bamboo-bearing people of the washer and the potter castes, likewise the Olia people of both sexes.

The Perahera continues up to full-moon day of Esala. On the night of the full moon, and on this night alone, the shrine is carried in procession. But as soon as this procession is over the shrine is deposited in Asgiriya Vihare, and the "randolies" and the bows and arrows brought back to the Dewalas. Soon after, boiled rice, curries, cakes, etc., are "offered to the images of the gods."

The offering over, the Perahera re-forms and proceeds to the river at Gatambe (or Gonaruwa), bearing the bows and arrows and the "randolies." A decorated boat is in waiting, in which the four kapurales of the Dewalas, attended by "four other men," go some distance up the

river, carrying with them the swords and water pitchers of the goddesses; and, at the break of day, the kapurales "suddenly strike the water" with the swords, the "other men" at the same time discharging the "water that had been taken up last year," fill the pitchers afresh "in the exact place where the swords had been applied." This being done, they land, and having placed the water pitchers and the swords in the "randolies," they return with the procession to the city. The morning of the return is the "sixteenth day after the commencement of the Perahera." Then the two Adigars and "chiefs who may not have accompanied the ceremony" to the river, meet it on the road on the return at a place called Kumara Kapua, and accompany it to Asgiriya Vihare, "from whence the shrine being taken, the whole procession moves to the place from which it started at first, namely, the Maluwa." From the Maluwa, each procession returns to its respective Dewalas, the shrine is carried back to the Maligawa, and the ceremony comes to an end.

You will find it very much worth your while to be in Kandy during those nights in August when the four-fold procession of the Perahera lets loose a kind of devotional saturnalia in the town.

Tom-toms in Kandy you are used to, but these nights the drums deafen all other sound, waving torches have turned the streets into rivers of fire, and whether you look on from near or far you cannot but be moved when the rocking elephants heave in sight, pandemonium reaches its zenith, devil dancers spin like teetotums, trumpet-blowers and tom-tom-beaters and ash-smeared maniacs cracking great whips like pistol-shots become distraught, stately fans and umbrellas of silver and gold sway above the throng, and clowns on mammoth stilts clump before the regal figure of the Diwa Nilame, whose high and sacred

office carries with it the mastership of these ancient ceremonies.

Down the torch-lit path walled by serried masses of wide-eyed, exalted devotees, he paces with stately, sacerdotal tread. Behind him looms the sacred elephant of the Maligawa, on his swaying shoulders the shrine wherein the Treasure of Treasures is concealed. Before his feet eager, unwearying hands spread, roll up, and spread again the white cloth upon which he makes the ordained circuit of the town. Through the archways of the Maligawa paces the Diwa Nilame, the sacred elephant follows with solemn, lumbering footfall. Reverent hands lift down golden shrine from golden howdah, the Diwa Nilame tenderly receives the treasure, wrapping his hands for its reception in a cloth of finest silk. Tom-tom-beaters and trumpet-blowers march before him up the steps, he is lost to sight in that vista of archways which leads on to the shrine. As he enters its portals the frantic music without is stilled to a sudden hush.

A maroon explodes, like a clap of thunder.

. . . . .

I would not have you suppose that Kandy holds a monopoly in these annual ceremonies. What you see here no doubt transcends in spectacular magnificence anything that happens elsewhere, but there is a suburb of Colombo, long fallen into decay as a residential centre, and unexplored for that reason by most Europeans, which was yet once a royal capital and home of the Tooth when Colombo was a mere cluster of fishermen's huts. To Cotta, as we know the once lordly Jayewardhenapur, came the first Portuguese envoys to do their humble obeisance to the King. A nice dance his courtiers led them too, bandaging their eyes and leading them up hill and down dale for a week to impress them with the extent and variety of the

royal domain before they were ultimately led into the King's presence. A Sinhalese proverb yet likens any undue procrastination in everyday affairs to "the way we took the Portuguese to Cotta."

At first a fortress, and base for the Sinhalese armies who five hundred years ago overthrew two consecutive waves of the invading Tamils, Parakrama Bahu found the site an auspicious one to site his new capital upon in A.D. 1415, so here came the Tooth, and about it sprang up the royal city. Strong walls of dressed "cabook," broad moats crossed by causeways on which the wayfarer walked without fear of the swarming crocodiles, made of the place a stronghold in the marsh more impregnable than Hereward's retreat in our English fens. In the heart of the fortifications the storied elegances of the Palace and the Dalada Maligawa rose, according to precedent, side by side within the royal precincts.

It is on this historic site and about the new temple (the ancient Maligawa is now in private hands) which still enshrines sixteen holy relics, three of them authentic fragments of bones of the Buddha and the rest *dissecta membra* of various leading disciples, that the yearly Perahera of Cotta is staged. Buddhists venerate it as second only in importance to the spectacle at Kandy, but few Europeans, at their very door though it be, ever seem to hear about it. No spectacular detail is omitted, a score or more of elephants participate, and the strange "water-cutting" rite is performed by the Dewala Kaparala in due form at the Diyawana brook, whose waters, like those of the Mahaweli-ganga, are cleft with a golden sword and the golden goblets filled and emptied.

. . . . .

On that night of all the year when the full moon pours its whitest radiance on the huge Dagoba of Kelaniya, and

the eight miles of road from Colombo is thronged with an endless procession of Sinhalese of every rank and every age, ninety-nine-hundredths of them padding on foot like white-sheeted ghosts, but richer folk in rickshaws, motor-bicycles and side-cars, even their own Rolls-Royces, I and another made our way to this holiest fane of the Western Province, the only Europeans in a congregation of hundreds of thousands. This day to your Buddhist is what Easter Sunday was to the pre-war Russian. You remember Nekhludoff and Katusha's churchgoing on such a morning. Here the same spirit of gentle ecstatic love for all the world, for friend or stranger, orthodox or heterodox, seems to pervade the whole Buddhist community. The occasion is a public holiday, as usual, but there is no horse-play, no drunkenness, no rowdyism. Through every street of Colombo, and from suburbs and villages full twenty miles out, the streams of the faithful come pouring quiet-footed and intent, flitting by like ghostly, nocturnal moths in twos and threes, or pressing on in decorous files, exchanging their desultory chatter in undertones, with smiles rather than laughter, to the shrine before which not to kneel on such a day would be a deliberate gesture of apostasy to the Faith. In their arms they bear fruits and flowers, simple offerings of earth's harvest. Without commotion or disturbance, they press upon one another's heels close-packed as an ant column on the jungle carpet. Do not fear that your white face will arouse uncomfortable interest or attention. They have very good manners, these people. No one will jostle, crowd, or press his services upon you without invitation. Wanting guidance or information perhaps you ask for it. It is forthcoming in all courtesy, and your informant fades back into the throng.

In the Temple itself it is the same. Without let or hindrance you tread the holiest of holy ground, all that

will be asked of you being that you remove your shoes when others do so, when you climb, for instance, if the desire moves you, the ancient rampart that surrounds the bole of yon giant Bo-tree, and pace the narrow gravelled walk circling its massive trunk. It is a tolerant faith, this. Within these courts and sanctuaries bright with the flames of a million lamps, heavy with the smell of temple flowers, loud with trumpets and drums, endless processions of men, women, and children, bearing wondrous illuminated transparencies of waxed paper such as the island folk delight in, weave mazy figures of eight throughout a throng so packed that soon the perspiration will drip from your pores, but no one stares at the stranger, and looking again you perceive that every sixth celebrant is, like yourself, no Buddhist. Tamils come here in their thousands, acquiring merit according to their own lights in the temple thoughtfully set up for the Hindu deities in this Court of the Gentiles, where any Unknown God has the right to a shrine, and where among the graven emblems meet for the veneration of those of alien faith a spirited rendering of the John Bull coat-of-arms, complete with lion and unicorn, takes its surprising stand.

Immeasurable is the gulf between the manifestations of that piety which pins its faith in a hereafter to the doctrines of the quietist, passionless faith of the Buddha, and such crude and raucous orgies of Hinduism as the Vel Festival of the Tamils. Yet both are essentially of the East, deserve your observation, and being observed, will give you something to remember.

Kelaniya on the full-moon night of Wesak is a dream pageant, the Vel rejoicings in the squalid compounds of the Wellawatte and Bambalapitiya temples are Hampstead Heath on Guy Fawkes night, magnified to the *n*th power. But religion of a sort inspires this ebullition, and no back-sliding, milk-and-watery, one-day-a-week sort of religion



either. When Ramasamy sets out to honour his gods he certainly puts a little zest into the business. Though he translates the injunction in a different fashion from that which commends itself to his gentler and more mystical neighbour, "goodwill to all men" is in a sense equally the motto of the Tamil in Vel time, which falls as a rule but a week or two earlier than the Esala Perahera, and is similarly a long-drawn-out ceremony following an elaborate rubric over a period of days.

Its chief organisers and high priests are the "Chetties," the rich money-lending caste, who dabble in high finance, rice deals with India, Burma, and Siam, and what not large operations of business, in their own quarter of the Pettah. Immigrants and aliens all, they are yet a necessity in the economic life of the colony, and so far as commercial integrity goes stand high in popular repute. Vel, their strange barbaric god of silver gilt, accompanies them, with all his gorgeously caparisoned cars and other paraphernalia, from the neighbouring coasts of Southern India. In his honour three temples have arisen, in Sea Street, Pettah, at Wellawatte, and at Bambalapitiya, both on the Mount Lavinia Road. These he inhabits in a strictly-ordained sequence, after the manner of the rich uncle who allots the honour of his visits in turn to his expectant heirs. These recurrent peregrinations of the god are the focus of an annual maelstrom which makes the main thoroughfares of Colombo a terror to the unwary passenger. One year he goes in state from Sea Street to Wellawatte, the next from Wellawatte to Bambalapitiya, then from Bambalapitiya back to Sea Street in Kochchikadde, a journey of some six miles. A kind of deputy god precedes him in this endless round, remaining always one stage ahead.

The Chetties are hospitable folk, and delight in honouring European guests at these convivial functions. Vel makes himself unpopular with us civilised folk in the streets,

which are throughout the festival jammed tight with shrieking, braying coolie folk and their families, blowing and beating every conceivable kind of demoniac instrument, their footways completely blocked with stalls and stands whereon the most fearsome edibles and potations are displayed, together, in later years, with an astonishing diversity of pedlars' rubbish, from Birmingham or perhaps Czechoslovakia.

But come with me to the inner courts of these temples. We are received, you will observe, with the deference due to a royal ambassador.

The Chetty is a portly fellow of an amazing circumference in the region of the diaphragm, who shaves his head daily, smears his brow with glistening *chunam*, and is never seen without his caste-mark between the eyebrows. More disconcerting still for the fair passenger not yet grown accustomed to such portents, he adjures clothing but the minimum required by decency, his habit being to walk abroad in a state of complete nakedness from the waist up. Apparently he feels the Colombo heat more than most.

Truly the profile of that double line of Chetties who will be drawn up to receive you in the precincts provides a startling vista. You know, perhaps, that primitive form of gate still popular in some of our southern counties under the full-blooded and ancient name of "squeeze-gut." Imagine an arcade of such placed one behind the other, and you get the essential lines of the picture.

But your hosts are politeness itself. You will be led to a tapestried chair or divan, weird sweetmeats and syrupy drinks will be pressed upon you, perchance even a whisky and warm soda. You are conducted through the thronged temple courts to the shrine, veiled now by a curtain something shabby, before which a multitude of lamps leap and splutter. Rival bands, each within six

feet of your ear, discourse native and European music (homely airs—"Highland Laddie," and others of that epoch), each in a spirited struggle to discourage the opposition. There is a hoarse cry from the ashen-smeared priests who crouch before the shrine, the rude curtain rises clumsily, a hot waft of incense assaults your nostrils, the lamps flare high and splutter excitedly. Behind you the crowd prostrates itself in its thousands. Lurching and rocking, the gorgeously bedizened car, every inch of its gilded fabric crowded with the writhing exotic ornament with which none of the apparatus of Hinduism can dispense (best not look too closely into its detail), move forward, its freight of many-armed goblin gods jerking and quivering, for the golden Vel in his silver shrine has his satellites disposed cornerwise about him. The thud of the tom-toms rises to a roar. High croaking voices salute the god with a fervour that leaves your ear drums aching. Vel in his car makes but a short perambulation, and retires rocking behind his curtain. The performance has been a special one in your honour.

Your own reflection at this moment, had you a shaving-mirror handy, might horrify the old folks at home not a little. Round your neck are divers "garlands," embarrassing decorations from which you can escape at no function whereat the Indian element predominates, heavy scented ropes these of sweet-smelling "moogerin" and jasmine. Into your right hand have been pressed green limes and sprigs of an aromatic herb whose savour reminds you of the southernwood or "old man" which you plucked to smell in pinafore days.

Dark fingers have bathed your brows with rose-water, applied some viscous compound which may or may not have been white of egg, and imprinted thereon a round spot, as large as a sixpence, of deepest madder. Lucky if you came in a car, for decency compels that

you shed nothing of these vanities within a mile of the temple.

You shake hands with about forty of your hosts and back out. One of them cleaves a way for you through the crowd to the temple gates. In your passage you all but stumble over an obstacle in your path. You thought it perhaps some gnarled mud-encrusted tree-trunk, litter of the fair-ground whose swings, roundabouts and cockshies, all in full blast, hem in the temple with pandemonium.

If you look closer you will see that this mud-encrusted shape, caked with filth, is squirming and alive. Eyes like those of a crazed wild beast, bloodshot to the iris, blink at you out of a tangled and clotted mane. The thing rolls over, and you see one plastered arm clutches in its curve a basket, a primitive cradle of rushes such as fishermen use, just such another, in fact, as Bible prints depict Miriam drawing from its reedy hiding-place, a chubby Moses kicking within. It is all complete, even down to Moses, a dusky homuncule of three months who clutches with his tiny arms a garland of jasmine, his only wear. No dust on Moses, even though his strange companion now rolls completely over. See, he has gained a whole yard, holding the while the cradle aloft and out of harm's way with the adroitness of a music-hall acrobat.

A vow? Precisely. Moses is the eighth. Numbers one to seven died all within the month. Rasiah the fisherman swore an oath. If his eighth-born lived to Vel Day he would roll even in this wise before the car from Kochchikadde unto Wellawatte Temple, which is four long miles. Look, already the child kicks more lustily in its cradle. Another twenty yards, and Vel will be paid in full.

One other picture. More than a rarity in these days, for you cannot, they tell me, now meet with it in Colombo, where I looked on while the thing happened years ago. We have seen the gods working in their separate ways in

the hearts of Podisingho and Ramasamy. Let us concern ourselves with Meera Lebbe, another alien who has chosen Ceylon for the land of his adoption, while still swearing by the Koran and the Prophet's beard. He has, or had, an annual "tamasha" of his very own. Guests were not invited, neither were they discouraged. The show being generally staged at 2 a.m., and publicity for the proceedings being neither arranged for nor desired, generally speaking there were none.

British soldiers in the India of an older day were aware that in Moharram time the Faithful would meet, when the occasion was auspicious, for a ritual which is older than history, a puzzle to science, confined to no race or creed, but sporadic in its outcroppings here and there about the world. Everybody has heard of the "rope-trick," and none, I swear, has seen it, or believing himself to have seen it, has not been deceived. Everyone, too, has heard of "fire-walking"; a few have actually witnessed it; I for one, and I declare positively there is no trick about that. The British soldier then, who was privy to these matters at a time when they were more frequently in evidence than now, with his habitual knack of Englishing strange words, turned the "Ya Hassan! Ya Hosain!" ceremony, practised by his Mussulman comrades at the anniversary of the death of two nephews of the Prophet, into a homely "Hobson Jobson."

"Hobson Jobson" is performed as follows. The devotees—in Colombo they used to be Coast Moormen and a sprinkling of Malays, though I have heard of a Tamil labour force staging a demonstration for some popular *dorai*—would choose, somewhere on the waste ground of the Malay quarter in Slave Island, a site for the digging of a circular pit of fifteen to twenty feet across, perhaps a yard deep. The whole would be filled with faggots, which, kindled at dusk, had resolved by

midnight into an even surface of glowing embers, a pool of lambent fire which smote one with a furnace blast at a range of twenty yards. Up to this limit where life was still maintainable pressed an eager crowd, men in fez-shaped Moorish hats and pork-pie Malay caps, rotund Malayan women voluminously swathed, a sprinkling of round-eyed, straight-browed boys and girls.

From a near-by "pandal," made gay with fronds of the young coco-nut, rose the chant of the devotees.

Two o'clock, or thereabouts. They filed out and strode down upon the pit in single file, ten or a dozen of them. Faster and faster they circled the pool of fire, fiercer and fiercer their wild cries and rhythmic gestures. The huge Moor who led them gave a sign. All but he drew aside. One handed him a mamotty (a cultivator's tool, half pick, half shovel), and stood by while with mighty strokes he cleft two inclined approaches, one at each end of the diameter of that fiery circle. Round they went again, and round. The march grew to a prancing, cavorting riot, the rhythmic chanting to the caterwauling of a Witches' Sabbath. A shrieking figure dived down the incline, straight across the burning fiery furnace, and out upon the farther side. The line turned and followed him pell-mell. Not once, but again and again they made the passage. They snatched babies from their mothers' arms and bore them, two and three at a time, across the glowing floor, now churned to a sparkling, pulsing incandescence. One rushed back and forth eleven times without a halt—and then I saw his friends hold him back.

I will admit to you what I looked for at this time. It was for the unmistakable smell of scorched flesh. Not the faintest trace of such a thing was to be perceived. I know these people were absolutely unshod—time after time they passed within a yard of me. They may have put something on their feet beforehand. Don't ask me,

because I don't know. If they did, it was wonderful stuff, and Burroughes and Wellcome ought to hear about it.

There followed a parade of the women. Not for these weaker vessels to make the crossing itself. An ordeal of sorts though, notwithstanding. There they stood, mothers mostly, clutching the babes vouchsafed in answer to their prayers. Muffled in sheets by their menfolk, they were deluged with buckets of cold water. Then a baptism of fire, dredged up in further buckets from the still-growing pit, a cascade of glowing cinders poured full upon head, breast, and shoulders. Unwound from their cocoons of sheeting, they mostly fainted where they stood.





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COMPLEAT BACHELOR

LONG ago, to be precise in the bad, mad but merry days of Charles II, there actually existed a royal Court unbrightened by a single feminine furbelow. There were no grand ladies, no maids of honour, not even a scullery wench. Its autocrat was an extremely high and mighty person, who brooked no advice or interference as to the number of courtiers' heads he might choose to have smitten off on any particular day. Yet every such potential victim could take comfort from the moral certainty that though his sovereign might decapitate him (or worse) as soon as he found his conversation boring, and that sooner or later such justification was bound to arise, it was inconceivable from their knowledge of the man that the royal prerogative would ever be stretched to the point of casting sheep's eye upon the ladies of his liege's family or fancy.



There was only one drawback. So nauseous in the royal estimation was the veriest hint or suggestion of a petticoat that the courtiers had to leave the gentler portions of their households *in villegiatura* when they came to town. The ban applied to all ranks, and at the palace even the junior bed-maker and the third cook's understudy were boys. This is not something out of Gulliver, but a minor fact of history, though Kandy and Whitehall had different standards, and one doubts anyway if the austerities of Raja Singho, King of the Chingulays, were counted unto him for righteousness subsequent to his demise, because he was really a much wickeder person than our own Merry Monarch, and not half so attractive on the social side.

Withal he had his engaging weaknesses, and was a great one for odd freaks and whimsies, not always of the blood-thirsty order. One of his hobbies in this wise was the gathering together, in the spirit of a kind of royal Barnum, of a menagerie of foreigners caught trespassing on his ground, and in the excitement of the sport he was indeed not above poaching outside it. Particularly proud he was of an assorted bunch of Europeans, Dutchmen, Dagoes, and a round dozen of jolly British mariners, flotsam of wrecks or beach forays, for hereabouts their captains brought many an Indian merchantman inshore for fresh water or new spars. Nor did this human aviary house any queerer bird than a certain Roundhead stripling, whom Raja Singho's minions waylaid on the shore one morning with his pockets stuffed with sermons and his mouth with texts. But a bird rather shrewd than callow, and, though fated as it proved to flap against the bars for twenty years before he won out to freedom again, more than a match for his captors, out of whom, poor silly heathen blackamoors, he cozened three separate fortunes with little more honest work than a trifle of



A VILLAGE IN THE JUNGLE



knitting, while royalty smiled upon a vassal whose deep-rooted aversion from the tempestuous petticoat vied with its own. As against this dire repulsion our Puritan could set an attraction, and indeed a singular aptitude, for filling his own pockets in situations where an Aberdonian Hebrew would have perished miserably. He had, moreover, the devil's knack in slinging an apropos text at your head.

Late in life this Robert Knox, who was captured at Coltiar in 1660, escaped and returned to England in 1680, was plagued with the itch that has troubled many better men, and gave himself away in the writing of an autobiography, having indeed seen much of the world and its peoples.

Knox was no Pepys, but he is well worth reading. What makes his notes historically valuable is the combination of his unparalleled opportunity for making observations of the island and its people, the keenness of that observation itself, and the possession of a methodical habit of mind which prompted him to store up all this information through the twenty years of his captivity and commit it to paper at the very first opportunity available after his release, namely on the voyage home.

There is a book in existence (though out of print, I take it), admirably edited and produced,<sup>1</sup> containing an extended version of his *Historical Relation of Ceylon*, which incorporates the autobiographical notes and additional MSS. discovered in 1910 in the Bodleian. It is clear from the inscription on the fly-leaf of the most valuably annotated volume which furnished forth this extra material that the book itself was the property of Knox Ward, Clarenceux King-of-Arms, who was a nephew of Knox and inherited from his uncle a certain Ceylon knife given him by a quondam fellow-captive, a Dutchman, whom Knox encountered on one of his later voyages to Cochin.

There is no doubt whatever that the *Historical Relation*

<sup>1</sup> Ed. James Ryan (Maclehose, 1911).

had a great vogue on publication, though owing to a curious clause in its author's agreement with the publisher (Richard Chiswell, Printer to the Royal Society, at the Rose and Crown in St. Paul's Churchyard), it was never reprinted. Knox in his old age became an undoubted literary lion, and his friends included several men of mark, Sir Christopher Wren for one, then President of the Royal Society, who acted as a kind of intellectual godfather to Knox. Robert Hooke was another intimate, and the verses engraved under Knox's portrait are his. The demise of this boon companion, however, revealing as it did the existence of a tidy little nest-egg of £30,000 in his strong-box concerning which he had maintained a discreet reticence during life, elicited the not very charitable protest from his old friend that he had taken a "mizer" to his heart unbeknownst, the pot calling the kettle black with a vengeance.

But the man of all Knox's circle who really matters to posterity was Daniel Defoe, who quoted Knox at great length in *Captain Singleton*. Inspired journalist that he was, who can doubt that Defoe sought and found the "copy" of a dream in the personal idiosyncrasies of this unctuous and pharisaical Rip Van Winkle? Take up *Captain Singleton*, and there before you is the Quaker who so adroitly served God and Mammon, an eloquent witness as to whether this is so or not. Further than that, the presumptive evidence is strong to indicate that what gave Defoe his very notion of writing *Robinson Crusoe* was his acquaintance with Knox, and here again the philosophic and pietistic discourses which so overweigh the classic narrative are strongly reminiscent of our oily friend in his habit as he lived. Its publication, in any case, only antedated his death by a few months.

Practically every one of Knox's companions in bondage (most reports agree all bar one, and his name was Stephen

Rutland) fell, sooner or later, from grace. With these twain at Lagundeniya lived "Roger Gold (Gould), Ralph Knight, Wm. Day, and Thos. Kirby." Many descendants of those British sailormen live at Lagundeniya still, know all about their ancestry, and are proud of it. Day's posterity calls itself De Appu, and is known to have had a feudal duty of carrying fresh milk daily to the King's palace at Nilambe, in itself an honour no doubt, but not exactly a sinecure, the way being long and laborious and the Pussellawa climate far from ideal for the purposes of milk conservation. The Ceylon Census Report of 1911 makes a note of the fact that certain undoubted descendants of Naucars de Lanerolle, a fellow-captive with Knox from 1672 onwards, were some thirty years ago still local celebrities in their district, having promoted themselves from counts to dukes under such names as "Duky" or "Dorkidoe" Le Nerolla de Ley (de Laisne) Franse Mohottige Don Samuel Appuhamy.

As for Knox himself there is no doubt about his scorn of petticoats having been a thing instinctive. One can imagine that the Sinhalese belles of his period were every bit as pretty and as witty as they are to-day. Caps were set at him in that long twenty years, we know, but never with success, though it is clear he felt his loneliness, and he must have known his chance of ultimate rescue a pretty thin one. But having run the gauntlet of these dusky charmers do we find him succumbing to something in the milk and roses line in the heyday of his long frustrated prime? Not a bit of it, for all the wiles of his good kinswoman Mistress Bonnell.

Writing to him on 31 March, 1702, she protests to Strype:

Indeed Capt. Knoxes rudeness in his letter did not at all move my resentment. I rather pittied his ill mannered and unjust aspersion of me, but I have suffered too much to let such trifles ruffle me, but I thought it was necessary to let him know huffing

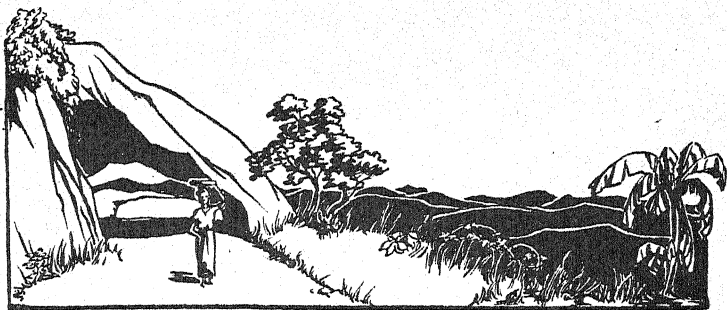
at abusive treatment should not provoke my charity, and indeed I had given it so largely to that poor couple in his absence that I could not continue an addition to what was promast without suffering it.

Seven months later she feels able to add:

I thank you for your account of Capt. Knox. I assure you I am very glad to here of his wellfear, for such trifles as his rude letter never sticks with me. If he be naturally rude and unpolished it would be unreasonable in me to expect that he should change his nature on my account.

Knox was nearly sixty then. He was close on eighty when he died on 17 June, 1720, still a bachelor, leaving what was for those days a fairly comfortable fortune, distributed with the methodical care and foresight that were second nature to him in "leguces" to innumerable nephews and nieces, the old bear being the exceptional member of a much-married family.





## CHAPTER IX

### BLUE AND GOLD

HAPPY few who have seen our Garden of Eden from the air. I knew well the first man who ever flew in an aeroplane over the rolling green sea of Ceylon's verdant lowlands, a gay young Frenchman, dead long since they tell me in one of the earliest cloud combats over Flanders. And he did but skim for half an hour the island's plummy fringe of coco-nuts and circle in all innocence that shrubbery wherein the Royal Garrison Artillery secreted certain popguns of its own which the public manfully pretended to know nothing about. My aviator looked inland to where the mountains rose range upon range in scarps of indigo and amethyst, sighed, shook his head, and came to earth. Those were pioneer days, it was but a year or two since Bleriot's Channel passage had given the almanac a new red-letter day. So my aviator came down, as I say, and was promptly arrested by a policeman. When they had searched his pockets and his makeshift hangar on the race-course, taken away all his films and developed them, and found them nothing but snapshots of a pretty lady who had dressed up in his leather overalls and goggles



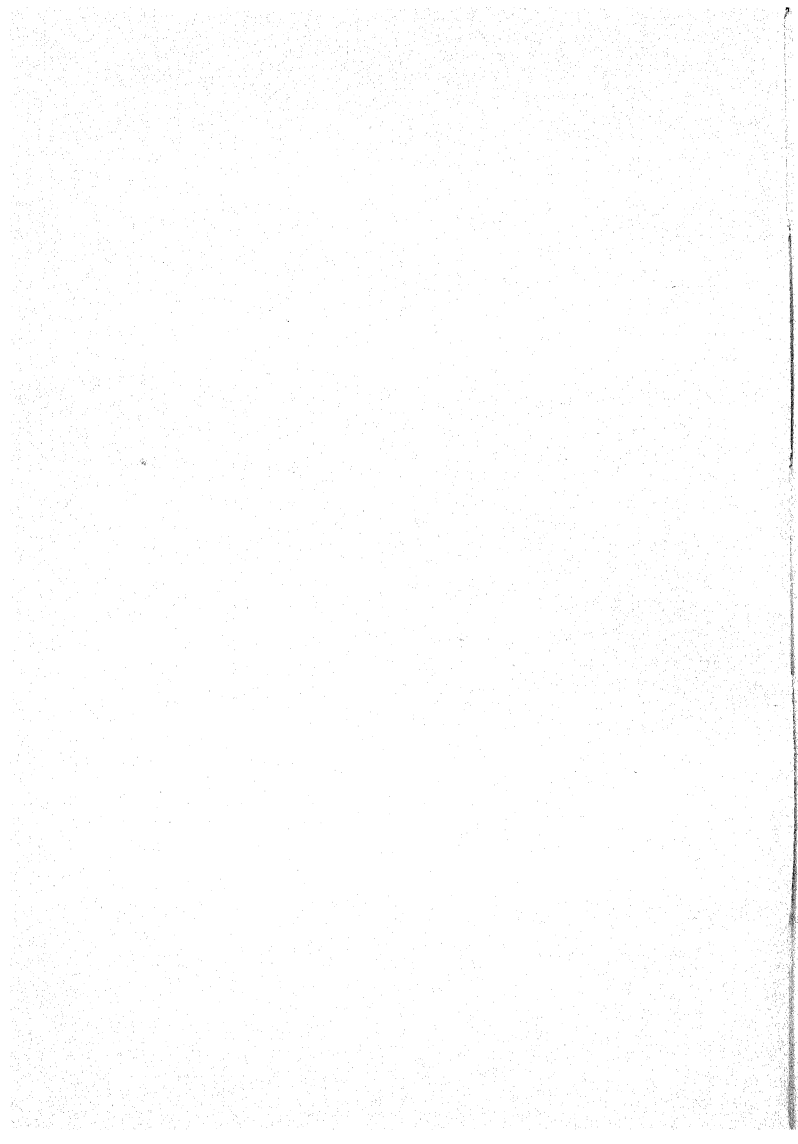
and posed for Monsieur with a manicured finger on the joystick, they let him go with a verdict of "Not guilty, but don't do it again."

Yet that bird's-eye view he told me was enchanting. He must come back this way and take the eagle's path, high through the azure over those blue mountains. But he went home another way, and then the war came, and though it brought us a seaplane or two to complete the astonishment of the natives, their pilots had no time to spare for junketings inland.

These days, round-the-world aviators fly down to us from India. Such a one, soaring high enough, would glimpse us as a ham-shaped sandbank with its knuckle end towards him, to the right a vague protuberance where Mannar's finger points the path to Adam's Bridge and the holy island of Rameswaram, at whose tip foams and swirls a two-hundred-yards-wide race of waters through the Paumben Pass, and then—India. Flat, flat as a billiard-table would show our island over three parts and more, its northern plain glinting here and there with the blue mirrors of ancient "tanks," a stupid word that, which suggests galvanised cisterns or, at best, municipal reservoirs, rather than the vast reedy meres that in size compare with the landlocked waters of Cumberland and Westmorland. Dipping lower, and if he knew what to look for, pale gleams might catch his eye now and again in the forest tangle, strewn bones of a Lanka that died long since, a mossy cenotaph upstanding here and there, yonder the Lion Rock of Sigiri bulking sheer from the green sea lapping its sides. Beneath him, in the lower air, the feathered battalions would wheel and pivot, flocks, columns, and picquets of teal, heron, and cormorant, winging their way with steady purpose from one inland sea to the next. Southward looms a new landfall, range on range of ultramarine and lapis lazuli rising to the battlemented scarps



TEA PICKERS



and jagged fingers of a plateau whose average elevation is four thousand feet above the plain and its major peaks three thousand more. Pedrotalagalla, supreme summit of the island, rises to eight thousand feet and over, but its truncated top is a plateau in little, with dells and savannas of its own, all overhung with groves and clumps of the lichenized rhododendron. The sharp-cut salient of Adam's Peak is more impressive far. To that needle point has clung a windswept temple for two thousand years, to which one climbs in the cool of the night-watches over shaking bridges dim with the spray of mountain torrents far below, hauls oneself hand over hand round the rugged shoulders of the Peak by age-old chains of a strange rustless iron, whose secret the island craftsmen lost long ago. Old Sumangala is dead now. Kings and abbots were his forbears, and he had ridden out the storms of half a century in his high-poised eyrie whose sacred fane encloses the footprint of the Buddha, himself the supreme and venerable guardian of the ancient mysteries. A wise old man, and a scholar profoundly learned not only in all the holy writings of the Faith, but in the tongues and literature of the West. Muffled to the ears and shivering for the bitter cold, I crouched with him one night against the coming of the dawn and the diurnal miracle of the Shadow, that sharp-cut triangle flung by the rising sun upon the billowing *Gnabelmeer* which laps the Peak to the wanderer's very feet. Gravely he spoke of men and things, and drew from a niche at his elbow, to illuminate some point of the talk, the current numbers of the *Nineteenth Century* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

But I desert my airman. His province being to observe these things, he would mark, passing the boundaries of this montane zone, how the deep and longitudinal clefts which make the plateau a cake, as it were, ready cut into slices, run parallel, almost due N.W. and S.E. by the

compass bearing, at right angles that is to the main currents of the monsoons. Now he will understand why, and where, we get our rainfall. In the arid plain which he has passed it may be twenty inches in the year. Here it is often two hundred. This is why the north-west and south-east corners of our island cosmos are burning deserts, why the south-west lowlands are a sweltering hot-house, why we get ten degrees of frost some mornings on the hills so that the sun comes up to find the tree ferns drooping limp and dead, and why alpine and sub-tropic species rub shoulders and palm meets pine in the space of a clod of Eastern earth that is, over all, only two-thirds the size of Ireland, its contemptibly few degrees of longitude falling entirely within the northern half of the world's tropic belt.

I believe botanists find our island interesting. Something of a range here, all within a twenty-four-hours' journey. Pressing inland from the slimy mangrove thickets, whose crustacean hordes crawl at will on earth that is Ceylon or paddle through water that is the Indian Ocean, or from that more arid littoral where spring the flowering fern and the contorted screw-pine or pandanus, for mile upon mile inland the only green things you come upon are the sand-loving palmyrah and those wizened useless growths, the neralu and wira, the last a mockery and a fraud, for it throws a heavy shade devoid somehow of comfort to man or beast, and beneath which no living thing will grow. Best of this bunch are the acacias, of which Mannar properly takes pride in its rare forest of *A. planifrons*.

To the dry zone proper, that region namely, two-thirds of the island in extent, where though the conditions are no longer arid rain falls but rarely, and since the old irrigation works in whose making the long-dead Kings of Lanka took such pride have fallen into decay and crops of any kind are hard to raise, belong the noblest timbers

of Ceylon. Here lift their heads our finest ebonies, satinwoods, calamanders, and neduns, but you may look in vain for an oncoming generation, and for the fact that it is not there blame the forest policy of past governments that will bring the island face to face with a timber famine before we are all of us much older.

But these are specimen growths merely, showing what Ceylon has done and may do again if her forestry resources be but properly husbanded. It is throughout the wet zone, wherein rainfall and sunshine alternate in lavish measure throughout the year, that our teeming forest growths rise thickest. Here the veined and marbled calamander or coromandel (*Diospyros quæsita*) still awaits the axe, with other streaked and flowered ebonies, its cousins, and our true sable ebonies, than which you can seek throughout the world for a finer, harder or heavier medium for the carver's chisel. Ceylon used, I would observe, to export calamander in bulk, governors and merchant princes would ordain its lavish use in beautifying the insides of their houses, for one can understand the vogue for interior decoration of a timber that is raven black when worked, banded alternately with grey, golden yellow, and dark purple, with all the weight, hardness, and capacity for polish of the finest ebony, for ebony it is. How many known calamander trees still flourish in our forests, think you? Fewer than one hundred and fifty. The true ebony, you must know (*Diospyros ebenum*), is yellow (sometimes black-striped) as to its sapwood, and only the heart is throughout of the jetty black we so admire. What we still have of it for sale brings in two hundred rupees a ton in the local market. More valuable still as a cabinet timber, for we still export a marketable bulk of it, though it grows rarer year by year with the rest, is the true Ceylon satinwood, *Chloroxylon swietenia*. Large, slow-growing, and semi-deciduous, it produces a timber of

intense hardness which runs in colour through a range of yellows, honey, gold, and orange, at times merging into palest green. Its durability is almost that of ebony, and, a point of local importance, it is both ant-proof and teredo-proof. Sleepers of it have lasted for thirty years in the jungle tracks of the wet belt, though to put a wood of this calibre to such a use is not only an extravagance but a desecration. An odd variety grows in some spots, known to the Sinhalese as "mal buruta," to us as "flowered" satinwood. This shows on working a foliated or wavy grain, an eccentricity probably due to wind or other damaging influences during growth, which triples the value of such a tree to the cabinet-maker. All satinwoods regenerate peculiarly, and where the adult tree is still fairly common saplings are often absent altogether should there be little topsoil or humus.

I can but pass over in brief catalogue other lovely or unusual island woods. There is the palu, hard almost as ebony, its hue that of a full-bodied tawny port, which takes a superfine polish and will hold out against termites for 130 years. Too heavy for household furniture, it is invaluable for other purposes. In the forests of the dry zone it is often a near neighbour of the satinwood, and has attained a recorded girth of twenty-six feet. The trade once knew it as "ironwood," a title properly belonging to *Mesua ferrea*, a huge evergreen with very dark, shining, lanceolate leaves, of an ashen white beneath, though when young the foliage shows of a glowing red. Ironwood when cut is dark red in colour, and reveals a straight fine grain. Forestry experts are doubtful if it is really indigenous. As a semi-sacred tree of the Buddhists, it might easily have been introduced in very ancient times. Its apparent gregariousness, in any case, is put down to the fact that groves planted long centuries ago have now relapsed into forest. Nedun (*Pericopsis mooniana*) is another

beautiful timber that grows rarer year by year, and in these days is used only for furniture. Slaty-brown in hue, it takes a magnificent polish. Common no later than thirty years ago, it grew best in such spots as are now covered with cultivated rubber. The money-grubber has uprooted it, along with the peerless coromandel. Fairly common still, thank Heaven, is the Ceylon rosewood (*Albizzia odoratissima*), which bears both beautiful timber and sweet-smelling blossoms. Of its cousin, *A. stipulata*, they make cattle bells in India, but in Ceylon let it run to waste. Tall and stately, often gigantic, towers the hora (*Dipterocarpus zeylanicus*), of which there is a giant near Ratnapura with a girth of nearly twelve yards and a clean bole of over one hundred feet. Another mammoth is the "shingle tree" (*Doona zeylanica*), useful as its name implies for roofing, sleepers, and bridges, and yielding an excellent clear resin. There is the handsome margosa, with its corrugated bark and close-grained ant-proof timber of mahogany-red, exhaling an aromatic camphor-like odour. Leaves, bark, and seeds are all used largely in native medicines of an anthelmintic type, and the seeds as ornamental beads. There is the "Ceylon oak," strangely like your rugged English veteran. Its seeds are edible, even as acorns are, yielding also the macassar oil beloved of our grandfathers. There is the gammalu (*Pterocarpus marsupium*), which gives a yellowish banded fine timber in great repute with the builders of old Lanka. The pillars of the ancient Kandy audience hall are of this wood, and are good for many a year to come. Its timber seems out of fashion these days, but before the war France imported as much of the strange kino gum which the tree secretes as Ceylon could send her, exactly for what purpose Ceylon never found out.

Last, but far from least of all our indigenous woods, I come to the lunumidella (*Melia dubia*). Its Sinhalese



name you will agree is music in the ears, and what Ceylon would do without it from the practical standpoint nobody knows. The pseudonym of "Ceylon cedarwood" is well earned, its timber being attractive to the eye, durable, and easily worked. Its oddest and certainly not least valuable characteristic is that it grows almost as fast as a mushroom, often reaching a breast-high girth of four feet and a height of sixty feet in under ten years. Another queer peculiarity is that its seeds will only germinate when scorched, and one of the few useful results attributable to the native habit of "chenaing" (of which more anon) is the chance encouragement thus given to innumerable lunumidella seedlings.

In an earlier chapter I chose to rank the jak (*Artocarpus integrifolia*) as an interloper from the primeval glooms. That he certainly is, though by rights and strictly speaking he is a trespasser in whatever part of Ceylon you may find him. Originally, no doubt, he was introduced (his huge fruits were sea-borne perhaps, though so valuable is he that you can understand any traveller making a point of bringing him along) from Malaya. Jak timber is of the highest quality, and is often when seasoned (it turns rapidly from green cheese to a ripe chestnut and ultimately almost black) palmed off as true mahogany. The huge fruits, with their nutritious musky nuts and pulp, are an indispensable ingredient of the commissariat in any Sinhalese household. Other exotics of far more recent importation, which do well in the island and are encouraged for their divers uses, are teak (brought here first by the Dutch and now cultivated systematically by the Forest Department), Honduras and West Indian mahogany, cedar, various Australian eucalypts, blackwood (also from Australia), many conifers, and the strange balsam of Peru.

Why, you will be wondering, does any man who takes

up his pen to write about Ceylon discourse of jungle trees in preference to rubber and tea, understood by the world to represent the stable industries of the island? The answer is that these strange, beautiful, and, commercially speaking, often highly valuable growths belong here, and that not only economically but æsthetically. They are part and parcel of that Paradise which an all-wise Providence decreed should be Ceylon. My argument is that the money-grubbers, seeking to improve on Providence, introduced the shrub from China and that other poisonous-looking tree from the mephitic jungles of the Brazils for their own sordid ends, and to make increasing room for their protégés blasted Ceylon's fairest hill-sides, scarred and tore the green mantle of our uplands, felled and burned the richest forests of the plain, to the end that the increase of their dividends might be indecently hastened. Providence, it seems, has hit back so far as the rubber industry is concerned, and even the tea magnates have shivered in their shoes for a space. To this day the damage they have wrought is only apparent to a few. Not so many years ago our montane zone was covered with a rich growth of indigenous verdure, now very largely replaced by tea, dotted with mathematical exactitude over mile upon mile of hills. Nothing grows between the roots of one bush and the next, "clean weeding" being not a motto, but a religion. The planting clearings have brought floods and siltings in their train, in the early days at least no proper "terracing" was carried out on estates, the rich top-soil or humus was washed bodily out of the district by our torrential rains, washed, I should say, clean off the island and out to sea.

But forget that. Even had we kept the humus, such wholesale deforestation would have been bound to affect our climate adversely, and it has done so. Disastrous floods in the low country, resulting in heavy economic

loss and not seldom in a serious toll of lives, are the direct results of deforestation up above. Nor were the planting pioneers the only wrongdoers. That pernicious form of shifting cultivation known as the *chena*, beloved of the constitutionally indolent Sinhalese, for by it he gets (for a time) most result by least labour, is at the bottom of the deforestation of the "patana" lands, leagues now of unprofitable wilderness inviting fires that spread the canker ever farther. And the tea and rubber people must have timber for fuel and timber for the cases in which they send their stuff to market. How do they get it, do you think? A colony with the sylvicultural possibilities of Ceylon actually *imports*, at this day, £200,000 worth of foreign timber per annum. There is a fuel famine already in sight. Under the present conditions returns from our forests will grow increasingly expensive as the proportion of the less accessible areas under exploitation grows, while supplies will steadily dwindle and increase in cost as the existing forest capital is used up.

The visible hardwood supply will last ten years and no longer. The tea and rubber trades are dependent upon a never-failing supply of soft wood for chests. Our resources even of that would peter out in a few months, once imports were cut off. Government appears to have its head still in the sand. Ceylon used to give a lead to Malaya, but they tell me that to-day the Federated Malay States, with only a shade over Ceylon's area to deal with, employs fifty-eight superior forest officers to Ceylon's sanctioned eighteen (existing nine). The Ceylonese themselves are coming, and will continue to come, more to the forefront in the government of their own country, and jealous as they are always ready to show themselves of immigrant commercial interests, surely here is a point upon which they might press for a revision of official policy. But one can see few traces of such a desire.

"Chenaing," as a conservative and ancient practice followed long before the advent of the European, they will always put in a voluble defence for, skating round all the common-sense arguments against it. Similarly they deprecate the introduction of trained European experts in forestry on the score that their recruiting would close avenues of promotion now open to Ceylonese. If trained Ceylonese were available no one would object, but they are not. Meanwhile they hardly seem to realise that the natural forests of their own homeland have been largely replaced with products of until recently greater commercial value, products only cultivable in just those wet and montane zones wherein Ceylon's most valuable native timbers formerly flourished. Never, till recently, properly regulated, the extension of tea and rubber has almost wiped out of existence the calamander, the nedun, and other timbers of the highest value, though men are trying hard now to save the former from extinction by starting seedling nurseries. Wholesale clearing of virgin forest tracts has brought about widespread erosion, silting, and recurring floods, and large areas of arable lands have suffered damage in consequence. Huge derelict areas, naked of any profitable soil, stand as the memorials of planting projects started with enthusiasm and abandoned in despair. On all such, rank and poisonous weeds spring up, dry to tinder in the hot weather, and are ravaged by periodic fires which spread as one might expect to what still remains of virgin forest on their borders.

But though white men and brown have played extraordinarily foolish tricks with her, they have not yet spoiled Ceylon. To this day her scenery remains, after its kind, incomparable. We have no snowline here, and there is more of soft and sensuous charm than of rugged grandeur about our mountains, but infinite variety and diversity, enchanting colour effects, and multitudinous surprises,

await the eye of any traveller who loops and hairpins about our mazy network of roads. For in the uplands a straight stretch of a hundred yards is almost a thing unknown, ravine succeeds gorge, cliff follows breakneck hill-side, till the plateau drops on all sides to the lowland jungle. Afternoons with us, save at the height of the rains, are always high summer, and over all the land there rests a shimmering glory of blue and gold. Switchbacking down from Kandy, perhaps, the windings of the way show you a dozen, a score, of different aspects for every blue peak, every emerald-mantled crest and hummock, within the four quarters of the compass. Where the hill drops sheer from Kadugannawa to the flat lands a multitude of terraced rice-fields rise, and every square foot of that spoon-shaped hollow in the hills for a thousand acres and more is terraced in strips, belts, ribbons, ovals, and rounded squares and triangles of new-sprung paddy, whose tender vivid green is only matched in Nature by the sudden freshness of young larch.

This Kandy climb is worth doing by rail, for once. The road for me in Ceylon, so long as good Samaritans have cars, but there are times to patronise the C.G.R. for all that. You might, for instance, want to go to India overland.

. . . . .

Opened just before the war, the Indo-Ceylon railway connection via the Talaimannar Peninsula, Dhanushkodi, and Paumben, by which land travel to the mainland now becomes possible with only one short break of some twenty miles covered by the ferry steamers that skirt the chain of sandbank known as Adam's Bridge, has proved of at least as much utility as its projectors hoped. Vanished are the discomforts of the dreaded crossing between Tuticorin and Colombo, home mails coming via Bombay

now reach Ceylon many hours earlier than of yore, while trade and passenger traffic between the island and India have, as was expected, been enormously augmented. Luck included me in the party that travelled on the first train carrying bona fide passengers to the tip of the Mannar Peninsula, throwing in further the opportunity to take ship on the first ferry-boat to Dhanushkodi, to observe while Olympian Excellencies made mystic passes with ceremonial batons and uttered auspicious words at the formal opening of each section of the route, to banquet in mushroom pavilions on the desolate site of Hanuman's Causeway, listen to interminable speeches, and stand at gaze while the first train to India from the holy island of Rameswaram clattered out of ken high above the swirling race of Paumben Channel.

Never hesitating as he does to embrace any conceivable opportunity of turning working days into festivals, the Colombo native had voted himself a Bank Holiday the previous afternoon, when we fought our way through packed streets to the Maradana terminus and disposed ourselves according to plan in specially reserved compartments. Bunting fluttered, vistas of State carpet invited gubernatorial feet to tread boldly, safely guarded against the impact of vulgar earth, pompous officialdom kow-towed, an invisible underling whistled "All Aboard," came a snort from the gaily decorated engine, and the long train of fifteen cars gathered speed out of the station to the accompaniment of detonators placed at intervals along the line and cheers from the populace.

The railway people certainly did things extraordinarily well that time. They fed and wined us regally in three saloons. Viceroyalty unbent post-prandially to snip cigars and swap stories with the anonymous civilian, and few of us turned in before midnight, though early to rise was the order of things for the morrow.

We rose in the dark, the first limb to protrude from our spotless mosquito curtains evoking ample and immediate demonstration of the malarial character of the Mannar Peninsula, at least six anophelids tempting and receiving summary execution before I, for one, had adapted myself for the public view. Early tea in the growing dawn brought more evidence on the malaria problem in Mannar, the nightmare landscape that grew into definition outside the saloon windows revealing one sinister feature in particular—an almost unbroken series of stagnant pools formed by the "borrow pits" that have won so unenviable a notoriety. Scarecrow talipots and the uncannily flattened bushes that are so characteristic of this desolate district were the only outstanding objects of the scene, of goats and kites a few, of human beings apparently none.

And so, a few minutes before 6.30, to a halt at the little station of Talaimannar, a derelict place enough seemingly till these festivities made it gay with bunting and red carpets. Here the Chief Resident Engineer handed up to our Governor a small silver-mounted baton of ebony. Raising it above his head, he said, with quite admirable brevity:

"I declare this line open. May it prove prosperous and auspicious for all time."

Then we had to jump into the train again, and ran quickly down the last short section of the line and out over the water along a big jetty at whose side the *Hardinge* lay waiting to carry us over the twenty-odd mile jump to Dhanushkodi. Once the zigzags of the first quarter-mile of channel had been mastered, the turbines pushed our little cockleshell along with hardly a tremor at something like twenty knots.

Two hours saw us within hailing distance of Dhanushkodi jetty, the identical spot, according to tradition, where Rama's ministers started the causeway over which the

abducted Sita was able to escape to the bosom of her family. Here a large and gaily decorated pavilion (they call them *pandals* in these parts) had been reared. In the most welcome coolness of its shade all of us now gathered to watch the formal opening of the Dhanushkodi section by the Governor of Madras. The Agent prefaced these formal proceedings by getting up and telling us all about the scheme. We were reminded that the problem was far from being a new one. In far-off mythological ages the same puzzle had presented itself to Rama as soon as he had made up his mind that to invade Ceylon was the only practical means of recovering his consort Sita, lately forcibly abducted by Ravana, demon king of the island. On reaching Mandapam and later Dhanushkodi, on which the party stood at that moment, the injured husband found his passage barred by the ocean. Not to be balked of his purpose he summoned his Minister of Public Works, Vala, a son of Visvakarma, who was detailed to bridge the channel, and not waste any time about it either. To hear was to obey. Vala called up Chief Engineer Hanuman, who turned on his army of monkeys in full strength. Unless legend lies, the resultant causeway from India to Ceylon took just five days to build, time enough at least for Rama to continue his journey and recover his queen. Permanent results of this occurrence are to be found in the sanctity which still attaches, and the pilgrimages which have continued without ceasing to this day, to the temples founded by Rama during his return journey from Ceylon upon the island called, after himself, Rameswaram.

They say the palm squirrels took a hand at helping Hanuman's monkeys, rolling their furry bodies in the sand, shaking themselves on the earthworks, and patting and pawing the sand into the joints as it flew out of their coats. Rama looked on well pleased, stroked the little volunteers with his three middle fingers, and there the



three black stripes are to be seen down the palm squirrel's back to this day.

Centuries rolled by, and a different race of men found their way to the same spot in Southern India, and for reasons of a more practical character were seized with the same desire to invade Ceylon by way of Adam's Bridge. Convulsions of nature and the neglect of man had in the meantime obliterated the handiwork of monkeys and squirrels, and the new invaders found themselves in the same dilemma as Rama. They too sent for their Chief Engineer and directed him to bridge the gulf. The hosts of the *bandar-log* not being his to command, he set in motion the new engines of construction which the fertile and commercially-minded brains of his countrymen had invented, and built the works now about to be declared open for the promotion of the peaceful pursuits of trade and commerce.

India and Ceylon between them spent more than thirty years in bickering over details before it was finally agreed upon to build a viaduct across Palk Strait with a Scherzer Rolling Lift Bridge over the Paumben Pass, and to run a service of ferry steamers between Dhanushkodi and Talaimannar. Originally it was proposed that these should start from a basin within Rameswaram Island, and should carry trains across bodily, but in the end the vote went for ordinary ferry steamers and piers. One of these was therefore erected on either side of Dhanushkodi Point to allow of the steamers adapting their course to the prevailing monsoons, similar provision being arranged at Talaimannar. The viaduct, built for a single track line on the metric gauge, is nearly a mile and a half in length, with 145 spans. The Scherzer Lift Bridge measures the best part of a hundred yards between piers, leaving a clear way for vessels two hundred feet wide and fourteen feet deep. Those who built it insist that it runs throughout

its length on the identical causeway which Rama's forest allies are credited with having raised thousands of years ago.

At this stage the Governor of Madras became the gratified recipient, as they say, of a gorgeous gold and enamelled casket, whose panels showed the new method of bridging the seas between India and Ceylon as compared with that obtaining full four thousand years ago in Rama's legendary day. In the forefront (a not very fortunate effort this, but what subject could well be less suited to the enameller's art?) the designer had portrayed the viaduct from the mainland to Rameswaram Island, with a train in motion about to make the passage of the Scherzer Lift Bridge. A mechanical subject likewise filled one of the end panels, whereon appeared one of the geared turbine steamers in service on the Adam's Bridge route. On the back panel, however, the old order of things was glimpsed. To the left of the picture one saw revealed the Ceylon fortress which Rama had set out to attack with a view to rescuing the gentle Sita from her so shameful predicament. In the middle could be detected Rama's monkey host crossing the causeway they had just completed, and on the right Rama himself in the van of his avenging army. This scene was copied, so they told us, from an ancient Sanskrit manuscript purchased shortly before by the India Office. The remaining end panel depicted the great temple at Rameswaram founded by Rama on his return from Ceylon. One of the most venerated in India, every good Hindu aspires to visit it once at least in his lifetime. That journey used to be a very considerable undertaking. It is child's play these days.

The Madras Governor having patted his staff on the back and proceeded formally to declare the Dhanushkodi section well and truly open, Indian and Ceylon visitors joined forces, entrained together on a South Indian Railway special, and were conveyed over the short distance

separating the jetty from Dhanushkodi station, where an elaborate breakfast was produced for which most of us were simply panting. More speeches followed, notably one in French by the Governor of Pondicherry, and breakfast over, the whole party took train once again for the station of Rameswaram, where a visit to the great temple was one of the outstanding items of the afternoon's programme. Much speechifying had by now given us cause to fall a little behind our time-table, but as, when all your train connections are "specials," the laws of time-tables cease to become arbitrary, this hardly mattered.

The run of half an hour from Dhanushkodi to Rameswaram takes you through a landscape that though novel can scarcely be described as attractive. When the rails are not running upon white sand that throws up an almost blinding reflection of the sun's rays they appear to be running on water, the causeway consisting, it is said, of coral rocks dumped straight into the wet sand. A few kites hover in the burning sky, a few big black-and-white gulls float idly on the surface of these huge lagoons. A mile away half a score of pilgrims are splashing through four or five inches of water, the uniform depth of a sheet that may be many hundreds of acres in extent. If you see a man in this country you may be very sure he is a pilgrim, there being no possible reason that could attract any other variety of humanity to such a land of desolation. One wonders who owns the few goats that on the dryer patches are now and then seen going through a motion that resembles browsing. There is only sand, and they must ere this have grown very weary of the joke.

Rameswaram station courtyard shelters divers cars and three huge motor-brakes, and herein are we conveyed through the most picturesque village—low pillared houses of enduring stone whose roofs and balconies are crowded with a babbling and brightly-clothed horde of many-

shaded brown humanity ("handsome gals," was my neighbour's tribute), to the great temple of Rama itself. Therein a perambulation through vast arcaded vistas that leave their own strange but not unstirring impressions, with occasional halts while the trustees direct the attention of the great ones of the company to some shrine or other object of veneration, in the course of which adventures all the Excellencies present acquire garlands to the point of semi-suffocation. An inspection of the temple treasures is not the least interesting of these episodes, which culminate in an exhibition by four pleasing and splendidly arrayed damsels of the most innocuous nautch dance that ever was, either in Hindu temple or any shrine of the Russian ballet. A piercing *God Save the King* from the bugles of the temple band precedes the remounting of our particular charabanc. So back, a little hot, tired, and dusty by this time, to the station.

But there is still by far the most wonder-compelling of all the day's spectacles before us. It is the Paumben Viaduct, whither, in another half-hour, we are conveyed, to walk out over the swirling, rushing shallows, to that wondrous machine which rears huge, intricate, skeleton red arms to the sky on either side of a five-knot flood that is two hundred feet in width.

Pigmies, perched in some lofty niche, pluck and paw at the monster's vitals, and behold, the great limbs drop, relentlessly yet almost imperceptibly, to meet exactly and by a hair's-breadth ruling, in the exact centre of the gulf. There is a whistle, a familiar roar, and a train has crossed to the mainland of the Asiatic continent by a path that a few minutes ago was thin air.

It is in truth a marvel, and the mainspring of all our talk throughout the pleasant coolness of the homeward trip on the swift, faintly throbbing *Hardinge*, and, later, through the dinner that we all approve more than ever

because we are hungry and the evening that we make no scruples to shorten because we are tired.

To criticise those people who exploit the working planter (I believe I was guilty of it a few pages back) is not to criticise the planter himself, a stout fellow if you take him by and large, whose job whatever he happens to be growing, tea, rubber, cocoa, coffee, coco-nuts, cardamoms or whatnot, is more of a man's work than money-spinning under an electric fan. Gone is much of the glamour of his old-time life, for few planters own their estates these days, and most are at the beck and call of the agent of a company (more likely many companies) who view the men on the spot as cogs merely in a vast machine. And when trade slumps are the order of the day and the watchword is economy, efficiency, and the devil take the hindmost, the working planter is found sticking to his lonely *totum* like a Ceylon leech. Not for him the gallivantings at Nuwara Eliya, for which he can spare neither the time nor the money, nor the vaguely extensive sporting expeditions for which his magazine prototype finds such frequent opportunity. Yet he is often carelessly traduced by those who come and go, and write lightly of what they do not understand. Farrer is responsible for a pretty useful libel, writing somewhere of the typical Ceylon planter as an uneducated boor who does not understand or want to understand the native, compares highly unfavourably with the official caste from the point of view of education and good manners, invariably drinks more than is good for him, and treats himself to perpetual holidays at a certain "toy Surbiton by its toy Grasmere," presumably Nuwara Eliya. That is nonsense, and offensive nonsense. Any one who knows Ceylon at all is perfectly aware that Nuwara Eliya is not a planter's

haunt in any sense of the word. The place is run by Colombo for Colombo, and very few working planters have either the time or the means to sample its dubious joys from one end of their agreement to the other. As regards understanding the native, to do exactly that is part of every planter's business, and no superintendent or assistant on an estate who fails to manage his labour force satisfactorily has any chance whatever of keeping his billet. As to his education and social qualifications, I should say that there are black sheep in every fold, including the Government service, but that the average planter is of precisely the same *jat* as the average Civil Servant, which is to say that he is more likely than not to have been to a public school, and in any case may be assumed to know how to behave like a decent Englishman until his conduct proves otherwise, which may happen perhaps sometimes, but not often. If he is a good man his coolies will not be slow to appreciate that fact, and you will see it reflected in the returns of the estate. His employers will be on the look out for evidence of that sort, you may be very certain.

The planter, in my humble view, is the salt of the island. As for his wife, for even planters must have homes of their own sometimes, I will confess that I am sometimes sorry for her. Much depends upon the location of her husband's billet; but there are more lonely estate bungalows than the other kind, and I have often suspected a proneness in the newly-imported bride to sit in her long chair on the veranda during the compulsory absences of her spouse, who has at least all kinds of interesting jobs to attend to not only afield, but in the busy factory, about which hangs ever the acrid and stimulating perfume of tea in the making, and weep like anything to see such quantities of—tea, or rubber, which is even worse. In the tea country it rains and rains and rains for weeks,

sometimes for months, on end. The average estate bungalow's horizon during that period is a rolling wall of vapour on all sides, and within it nothing but massed battalions, brigades, and divisions of absurd dumpy tea-bushes. What can a poor girl do in such surroundings, unless she is a model of all the domestic virtues and goes in heartily for keeping pigs and poultry? The usual bungalow kitchen, at least, is no place for a white woman to meddle in if she values either her own peace of mind or the good will of the staff.

But not all planters are married. The male of the species is devilish lonely, too, sometimes. I refer you to the case of Charteris, a Straits man as it happened, but I don't doubt there being some of his kind in Ceylon.

Charteris came down from Rugby with no particular idea of what he wanted to do. When he had been playing tennis with the Vicarage girls for three months his father, a harassed country medico, packed him off to the Straits with a £50 outfit and the offer of a prentice billet on a rubber estate.

Charteris was nineteen, full of life as a two-year-old, with no brains to speak of, but straight—according to his lights. His billet proved to be at the back of beyond. There was no tennis, no Vicarage girls. The next white man's bungalow was ten miles off. Plenty of work till four o'clock. Thereafter—boredom, or the tantalus. Charteris avoided the tantalus, and learnt Tamil.

The head "Kangany" (a lascar would have called him the "serang," any British working-man just a foreman) had a daughter. Fairly high caste as estate folk went was Lakshmi. Fifteen years old, lissom and rounded, with the slender straightness of a *Syrinx* (why are not Vicarage daughters trained to carry loads on their heads?),

Lakshmi found favour in the sight of Charteris. The process, in fact, was mutual.

Charteris perfected his Tamil, proved to his own satisfaction that even a "sundowner" in the tropics was a non-essential, had five minutes straight talk with his head Kangany, and thereupon embraced, I suppose you would say, a life of sin. "Everybody does it," is the usual excuse. Charteris made no excuse to anyone, even at the club, a place he got down to about once in a blue moon.

In five years he was manager of the estate. His agents in Singapore offered him a better job. Better pay, better climate, civilised "amenities," everything better. Charteris took it. He did not, however, like most men in such a case, "leave a lot of little things behind him." A more robust but still stately Lakshmi went too, with other impedimenta. Four of them, in fact. Charteris ran up a tiny annexe to the new estate bungalow, and paid for it himself.

Rather a smart club here, a place of frequent tennis parties and teas, dances even. The men decided they liked Charteris all right, but the women looked down their noses. A hatchet-faced female collared Charteris's agent when he came up for a week-end to have a look at the rubber.

A week later Charteris was moved. A rather frosty chit informed him that his new charge was a low-country one. A good billet, but a rotten climate.

The family migration was repeated. Charteris lost over the annexe, the new manager having no use for the same.

Six months later another senior partner arrived from Home. Very wealthy, and a pillar of the Church Missionary Society. The first thing he did was to sack Charteris. The junior partner tendered certain advice in a private letter, "We shall miss you very much, my dear fellow, but *il y a toujours les convenances.*"



Charteris looked grim, and applied for a job in East Africa. He got it all right.

Lakshmi was not one for scenes.

"It is good perhaps that you go. It may be that you will send for me later. If not, I go to my own country."

"Possibly," thought Charteris, "but what about the rest of the bunch? Bone of my bone——"

Anyway, he went.

Six months later Lakshmi got a letter and a cheque, which a polite young Englishman in Singapore cashed for her over the counter. A man was necessary for this undertaking. Her father was dead. There remained an aged grandfather on the estate where she was born. A laboriously inscribed post card collected him, there were steerage fares to take to Madras, a journey by rail right across India to plan, more steerage tickets from Bombay to Mombasa.

Lakshmi and her grandfather arranged everything. It took them six weeks to get to Bombay, an Odyssey brimful of perils, alarms, bodily misery, and stark terror. At one tenement lodging on the journey a "budmash" stole Lakshmi's box. All that was left of the proceeds of the cheque, all her trinkets and treasures. Only, in her sari, she retained Charteris's last letter. But the Polis Sahib to whom she fought her way was a real sahib. He read the letter, told Lakshmi to wait a fortnight, and produced the box, with most of its contents. In that fortnight the youngest child died.

There was a bad monsoon in the Indian Ocean, and the old grandfather broke his leg.

Charteris was waiting on the jetty. The last mail had brought him a letter which rather upset him. The rest of the job anyway should not be left to his clerk.

It was an extraordinary procession which wound through the Mombasa streets to a quiet lodging in the Indian

quarter. On the way Charteris, and behind him his family, passed the Cantonment Magistrate of his district, the Principal Civil Medical Officer, three military blokes he knew at the club, and his new boss.

"Good God!" said that gentleman. "Man's as mad as a hatter. Not that I'm given to poking my nose into people's private business. Dashed good report that last one of his. I suppose some fools would sack the feller."

. . . . .

Somewhere at the beginning of this book I wrote about the riotous behaviour of the vegetation in Colombo gardens. I hardly think it will fail to impress you, but it would be a mistake so early to exhaust your capacity for being exhilarated by the spectacle of what our Ceylon earth, rain, and sun can accomplish between them. You have not seen Peradeniya yet. The difference is at least that between Hyde Park and Kew Gardens. For a generation and more the botanic gardens near Kandy have been cutting a deliberate dash in the display line, with the expert aid of one of the best horticultural staffs in the world. Remember, too, that we are fifteen hundred feet and more nearer the clouds, and montane growths that wilt and wither in Colombo's Turkish bath will here perk up their heads alongside of their cousins from the steaming flats. Here, too, still grows everything that you saw before, and to a size even more surprising. There is something uncanny, devilish almost, in all this prodigality of life, and there are places in these gardens that make your flesh creep. You might think some crack-brained scientist had been freakishly experimenting, watering the arboretum of a nightmare with Mr. Wells's Food of the Gods. Give me the gentler sub-tropic beauties whose modest grace shines by contrast with these flaunting trollops of vegetables, the feathery tree-fern, the wild guava, the latticed

curtain of the passion flower, throwing itself in an exquisite disarray over every bush within reach, its green globes blushing almost as you watch them to that full purple which promises the ambrosial pulp within. These things are exotic enough, but belong to a world you can recognise and feel at home in. There is only one giantess here before whose physical perfections I can really bow down and adore, and that is the Gigantochloa bamboo. To every air that blows its nodding plumes curtsy a hundred feet and more above your head. By your shoulder its stem is the girth of a girl's waist, if not as supple. Yet you know the thing to be just a piece of grass, and feel that it is yourself who have shrunk to something infinitely smaller than a field-mouse.

Actually in Peradeniya resthouse it was that I lunched with an entertaining policeman, a pacha of many tales, one of which at least I have not forgotten, its hero a person of doubtful antecedents and less than no reputation, but none the less what our French friends would call, I think, *un type*.

Sollamuttu was certainly no gentleman. Docketed from boyhood up in the police files as an "habitual," the estimate did him less than justice. Two proved murders, a thrice-repeated "let-off" on a capital charge, thanks to sheer funk on the part of essential witnesses, seven dacoities, divers unmentionable crimes, and four escapes from custody while under sentence, made a record envied by many of his kidney, but approached by none.

Came the day when a Malay detachment laid him by the heels. An exceptionally nippy sergeant and two constables slipped the handcuffs on Sollamuttu just as he was sneaking out of the hut wherein the village miser lay weltering in his gore. An accomplice upon whom Sollamuttu had forgotten to put the "fluence" had blabbed. Frog-marching his prisoner to the lock-up, the sergeant's

grin broadened, and his tunic swelled with pride. At that moment Sollamuttu did a sort of ju-jitsu wriggle, snatched the sergeant's dirk, and punctured him neatly under the fifth rib. He was not so lucky with the constables, both lusty youths and very wideawake, and in about three minutes a more than half-strangled "habitual" was hurled neck and crop into a cell, its door locked, barred, and double-bolted.

His luck was dead out. As it chanced, the Chief Justice was even then passing through on circuit, and in two days Sollamuttu was tried, found guilty, and for about the sixth time sentenced to death. Upset at their sergeant's misfortune, the force remained very much on its mettle, and there were not going to be any escapes this time. Saturday was the last day on which it was intended Sollamuttu should behold the sun. About 9.30 on Friday evening he tore his cloth into strips, knotted them into a very handy rope, and hanged himself.

The Assistant Superintendent of Police whose job it was to preside while justice was finally vindicated cursed Sollamuttu heartily, not to say all his family, most of whom lived in the village, their compound being indeed the very core and kernel of a rather badly disaffected area.

The law was a little bit foggy on the point, but it looked as though by rights Sollamuttu's "people," in-laws, and cousins-german generally, had a right to claim delivery of all that was mortal of their erring relative.

Ye gods, what a "tamasha" would thereupon ensue! Eugene Aram's funeral a poky, hole-and-corner affair by comparison. And the courts chock-a-block for weeks with cases "arising out of the demonstration at X."—bags of trouble, in fact, for everybody.

The A.S.P. had a brain-wave, and sought counsel of the G.J., who had not yet packed his traps and passed on to the next resthouse.

The C.J. was a wheezy old gentleman, with a cherubic and wrinkled countenance. An upright judge, but cautious. He was very sympathetic and polite to the A.S.P., and tottered down to view the remains.

"Sheshiety ish well rid of a rogue," he pronounced, shook his head, and did not further commit himself.

"Sir, must the relatives have the body?"

"A demonshtation, ash you shay, is undeshirable, but you must shee the Governor."

To which end the A.S.P. mounted a stink-bike, and covered seventy-five miles of jungle road in two hours.

His Excellency had left by the morning train for the hills.

"Dash it," said the A.S.P., "we can't keep the beggar for a week."

There remained that extremely able but very cynical High-and-Mightiness, the "Col. Sec."

After hours of kicking his heels in ante-rooms, and having been snubbed by everyone from the A.D.C. to the peon, the A.S.P. was ushered into the Presence, and explained the situation fully.

The Presence heard, nodded, played a game of naughts and crosses with himself on his blotter, and delivered judgment.

"The relatives must have the body, but there must be no demonstration."

The A.S.P. swore as he kicked up the rest of his stink-bike, and beat his own record back to the village, arriving just as an S.P., whose olive countenance hinted that his maternal forbears might just conceivably have been "influential native gentlemen," blew along in his Ford.

"Leave it to me," was all he said.

In the decorative calligraphy of his putative fathers, the S.P. prepared instanter a round dozen of chits, one for the late Sollamuttu's every relative of importance.

"We are having a little funeral," they ran. "Do come."

The obsequies were a very grand affair indeed. All the police turned out in full dress, with arms and fixed bayonets. A machine gun and its impedimenta was included in the procession. The detachment mustered two fifes, who played *Every Nice Girl Loves a Sailor* very creditably, that being the only tune both of them knew. Not one of Sollamuttu's relatives showed a leg, all preferring to sulk in their huts. The Superintendent of Police coded the report for headquarters himself.

"Owing adverse climatic conditions militating delay," it stated, "burial deceased prisoner proceeded with. Care was taken attendance all relatives invited."

. . . . .

My young friend came to an end of Sollamuttu's story as Tin Lizzie curveted obedient to his hand and dropped me safely at the portals of Queen's Hotel by Kandy Lake. Week-ends at the Queen's, whenever I can afford them, are a private vice with me, chiefly because I consider its situation incomparable. Dining in solitary state, I rambled out by the lakeside where the old Kandyan wall trails its lacy fringe athwart the shadows. The place seemed full of ghosts, and two of them dogged me persistently as I made, in the whispering gloom of the trees, the circuit of these quiet waters. They must have had a history, that insistent pair. I almost think I will try to write it.

. . . . .

By the royal pool of Kandy, where at dusk the Palace of the Queens still throws shadows that bob crazily in the ripples lapping its island floor, you may see tourist ladies with veils and parasols driving on the new road. But once the woods and the water melted into each other. There were not any globe-trotting ladies, and the Queens' Palace was no heap of ruins strangled by jungle creepers,

but a masterpiece in fretted stone, every block as it left the mason's hand whitened with lime, laid carefully in oil, and baked in the noonday sun, so that the palace was as white as a wedding cake.

But when the twilight falls, and the quick-cooling air has hurried the tourist ladies back to their hotels to dress for dinner and begun to draw delicate cat's-paws across the pool, the night-things slip from their hiding-places. There is a rustling and a flapping in the shadows, dancing points of fire above the pool.

A little brown bird flits ghost-like from one stone to another on the Queens' island, flickers landward and back again, hangs poised above the shallows where the lotuses sleep.

. . . . .

There were no clocks at the palace, but Yasodhara always knew when it was time to get up. She came skipping through colonnaded verandas and down steps graven curiously with elephants, birds, and crocodiles, under the temple trees whence the mynahs squawked her a "good morning," and so to the little shaded arbour, where Queens might sit and dabble rosy feet in the ripples, sighing idly for the miracle of wings. She had a small bowl of rice in one hand.

Daintily, she began to give the sacred fish their breakfast.

"Ohé, brothers"—a handful of grain dropped among the lotus leaves. There was a subaqueous turmoil of swirling and scurrying, a splash or two, a shimmering of gold and silver bodies bent like bows, a nuzzling and jostling of leathery backs, a glimpse from the deeps of goggle, red-rimmed eyes.

A baby tortoise bobbed up among the leaves, stretched an absurd neck interminably upwards, and bent upon her a stony, expressionless stare.

Yasodhara protruded a small foot that was perfect in its contours. There was a gleam of honey-tinted loveliness—she was a Ranliya, “Golden Creeper” girl. One tap upon his back sent Peeping Tom to cover ere he could wink a horny eyelid.

Then she looked over her shoulder, and dropped bowl and rice at her feet.

Six feet away, a river-god crouched among the reeds.

Antinous at sixteen might have been his twin. Antinous warmed by more southern suns to a matter of three shades deeper than the golden glory of Yasodhara herself.

“Dog,” said that young woman, “whose fathers were dogs, I will clap my hands, and in the twinkling of an eye you will be dead.”

“Clap, then”—and he stood up, dripping, straight as a spear. “I am neither hind nor fisherman, but Rama, son of Kings, of the blood of the Lion.”

“Who spies on women.”

“Not with purpose. From tracking the stag at its first grazing, I came heated to swim. I am shamed and ask pardon. I will go back.”

But this Queen was thirteen, and lacked playfellows, and this Prince not much above a child, and in five minutes each was scattering the recovered rice among shamefully pampered fish, and two unoccupied arms, I blush to admit it, were about each other's necks.

“And so, to my marriage I set forth from my father's house with women and slaves to attend me, bearing also a fan, a diadem, ear ornaments, yellow sandalwood, a set of garments that had no need of cleansing, a spiral shell winding in auspicious fashion to the right, threescore measures of mountain rice brought thither by parrots, and moonstones such as are scattered only where the foot of Lord Buddha has pressed. You now, who say you are a Prince, tell me of this Lion your ancestor.”



"Of a truth the great-uncle of my grandfather was that Sihabahu whose mother became wife to the King of Beasts, as the soothsayers had foretold, of a strength exceeding the strength of men, and with hands and feet like a lion's, so that he rolled away stones from before his father's cave, and on his back bore mother and sister both to the cities of men, and thereafter acquired much merit."

"Your feet are not like a lion's. They are like mine. You are a liar."

"Verily the right blood of the Lion beats in my heart, and I am strong. I will bear you to my father's country, who is also a King. I could carry your Lord's other wives also, but will not. Or rather we will dwell in that cave, a good cave which I found hunting, where sits my Lord Buddha, of good omen, wrought marvellously beside the threshold. And before sit many lesser gods."

"You will show me these stones. But then I will come back. Neither will I be carried, but in a canoe by water, whence I will walk, if it be near."

"A bowshot from the shore."

"Then when the air cools and the flying foxes rise up, you will bring the canoe and hide it. I will cross alone. You who would bear on your back Kings' daughters may swim. Where the jak tree throws its shadow, wait."

Rama slipped away like an otter.

The temple-tree swayed in a cloud of drowsy perfume, and a pebble tinkled among the boulders. Yasodhara knew it for the haunt of green lizards and a host of furtive, quick-eyed folk.

. . . . .

Rama came up the track, walking cat-footed, straight and slim as a lance. Here was the jak tree. Here in a moment would come, treading delicately, a golden dryad. A branch snapped, a huge jak-fruit weighing

fifty pounds struck where neck joins shoulder, and the boy dropped without a cry. The two King's huntsmen slid earthwards and crouched over the motionless thing in the path. A confused, formless group detached itself from the shadows and staggered, softly grunting, into the void. Sound died in the jungle. Down in the pool a great fish splashed among the lotuses.

Yasodhara shivered as she peered among the reeds, bending them hurriedly this way and that. Her hand met the prow of a tiny fishing-canoe.

There was a clink of bracelets as she tucked her draperies about her knees, a grating of pebbles as she pushed out and headed, not too expertly, for the dark wall of jungle. A great tree towered above its fellows, and she altered her course.

On the other side it was cold, and the forest strangely still. No green fire-flies danced to-night in the brushwood. Sedgy growths stroked her knees with chill fingers, but Yasodhara's little feet pressed leaves that were sticky and warm. Furred blossoms nodded, and the lily-pads swung to and fro athwart the mirror of the pool.

But it was not the face of a King's daughter that the mirror gave back.

Very gently, Yasodhara stretched out her arms.

Up from the shallows where the lotuses slept, flickering about the towers of the Queens' Palace, skimming back and forth where the dark woods melted into the water, flew a little brown bird.

